

STEAMPUNK RED RIDING HOOD



WOLVES
AND
DAGGERS

MELANIE KARSAK

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

WOLVES AND DAGGERS STEAMPUNK RED RIDING HOOD, BOOK 1

Melanie Karsak

MelanieKarsak.com

[Join my newsletter, and get 2 FREE books!](#)

Wolves and Daggers Extras

[Pinterest Board](#)

Wolves and Daggers Steampunk Red Riding Hood

Copyright © 2018 Clockpunk Press

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be used or reproduced without permission from the author.

This is a work of fiction. References to historical people, organizations, events, places, and establishments are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to living persons is purely coincidental.

Editing by Becky Stephens Editing

Proofreading by Rare Bird Editing

Cover art by Art by Karri

TABLE OF CONTENTS

[WOLVES AND DAGGERS](#)

[TABLE OF CONTENTS](#)

[DEDICATION](#)

[CHAPTER 1: RUBY RED](#)

[CHAPTER 2: THE WEREWOLVES OF LONDON](#)

[CHAPTER 3: CURIOUSER AND CURIOUSER](#)

[CHAPTER 4: LIONHEART](#)

[CHAPTER 5: TO GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE](#)

[CHAPTER 6: ALES](#)

[CHAPTER 7: ASS](#)

[CHAPTER 8: MAGNUM OPUS](#)

[CHAPTER 9: BOOM GOES THE DYNAMITE](#)

[CHAPTER 10: 0-0-RED](#)

[CHAPTER 11: THE KNIGHTS TEMPLAR](#)

[CHAPTER 12: MISSUS COLERIDGE'S GLOBE HOUSE FOR UNMARRIED GIRLS](#)

[CHAPTER 13: WHAT CATERPILLAR KNEW](#)

[CHAPTER 14: THE ENEMY OF MY ENEMY](#)

[CHAPTER 15: MEANWHILE, IN TWICKENHAM](#)

[CHAPTER 16: CAPED CRUSADERS](#)

[CHAPTER 17: ALPHA AND OMEGA](#)

[CHAPTER 18: AN EYE FOR AN EYE](#)

[CHAPTER 19: WHO'S AFRAID OF THE BIG, BAD WOLF?](#)

[THANK YOU](#)

[ACKNOWLEDGMENTS](#)

[ABOUT THE AUTHOR](#)

[SNEAK PEEK: CURIOUSER AND CURIOUSER: STEAMPUNK ALICE IN WONDERLAND](#)

[CURIOUSER AND CURIOUSER: CHAPTER 1: THE POCKET WATCH](#)

WOLVES AND DAGGERS

Who's afraid of the big, bad werewolf?

When London's brightest tinkers and alchemists come up missing, Red Cape Society Agent Clemeney Louvel is on the case.

To help Clemeney get the problem in hand, Queen Victoria assigns her a temporary partner—a werewolf with a knightly history and a tendency to be far too flirtatious for either of their good. Can she trust him to help her chase down the monsters they're hunting?

Wolves and Daggers is a retelling of the Little Red Riding Hood fairy tale set in Melanie Karsak's bestselling steampunk universe.

DEDICATION

for Jen

CHAPTER 1: RUBY RED

PERCHED ON THE ROOFTOP, I watched the exit of Guildhall through my spyglass. The meeting adjourned, the members of London's most prominent guilds filed out to waiting carriages or steam- and coal-powered autos. Noisy contraptions. Clouds of soot surrounded the infernal machines. Why anyone would ever want to ride in such a contraption was beyond me.

"See anything?" Quinn, my partner, whispered.

He'd pulled out his rifle and was watching through the magnification scope.

"Not yet. Though—and just an observation—from this vantage point, they look like a flock of inebriated penguins," I said, motioning to the guild members gathered below. With their top hats and walking sticks, smoking pipes and cigars, the assembled crowd looked like a bunch of waddling luses. Were these really the most learned inventors in London?

Quinn chuckled lightly. "It's a *waddle* of penguins, not a flock. On land, they're called a waddle. In the water, they're called a raft."

"How do you know that?"

"Told you, I'm brilliant."

I rolled my eyes then grinned at him. Quinn's face was shadowed by his red hood, but I could make out his square jaw and Roman nose. I knew that the hood hid his ice-blue eyes, which seemed unkind to the average observer, but Quinn had the patience of a saint. After all, he'd managed to mentor me and serve as my partner in the Red Cape Society these last four years. Everything I knew was because of the man hiding in shadow. Which now included the fact that a group of penguins on land was called waddle, not a flock.

I smirked. "When was the last time you shaved?"

Quinn rubbed his chin. “You don’t like it? I was thinking of growing a beard.”

“And what does Jessica have to say on that matter?” I asked, referring to his wife.

“Well, there was some question as to whether or not I’d been bitten.”

I chuckled. “You’d have a lot more hair than just on your face.”

Quinn chuckled. “So I told her.”

I turned my attention back to the crowd. “Better shave it off anyway. If your lady doesn’t like it, what’s the point?”

“It’s bloody cold out here at night. Thought it might keep me warm.”

“You don’t see me complaining.”

“Your hair is all the way down to your... Well, you know. Hardly fair. Now, mind the job and leave me alone, or I’ll grow it out to look like Merlin just to vex you both.”

I snickered. “All right. I’m just making suggestions.”

“You’re always making suggestions, Clem. In fact, you’re starting to sound like your grand-mère,” he said with a grin.

“Pardon me?”

He grinned.

I winked at him—pleased to see an amused smile on his rugged *and hairy* face—then looked below once more. “Here come the clockmakers.”

The members of the Clockmaker’s Guild chatted noisily as they exited Guildhall. Each wore a watch pinned on their lapel, a telltale sign of their trade. The Motor Car Association members convened in another corner of the yard. Plumes of tobacco smoke, rough voices, and the distinct smell of brandy rose into the air.

I pressed the cold metal of my spyglass to my eye and scanned the building. Another group of guild members wearing distinctive plum-colored

cravats started flowing out of the building.

“The League of Alchemists is coming now,” I whispered.

“I’ll keep my eyes on the ground. You watch the rooftops,” Quinn said.

I nodded then stepped back into the shadows. Quinn and I had hidden in the darkness beside a tall chimney on one of the buildings that sided Guildhall Square. The view was good, the opportunity for subterfuge better.

Quinn stayed crouched, his eyes on the assembled men and women in the courtyard. Pulling up my hood, I drew my pistol from my belt and scanned the rooftops.

An early spring breeze blew across the roof, sending a chill down my spine. Quinn was right. It was unusually cold. I eyed every dark corner, every shadow. Nothing was moving. The tip we’d received had come from a trusted source. Something was supposed to go down here tonight. But what?

“There’s Professor Delaney. Professor Andrews. I think... Yes, there she is. Professor Jamison,” Quinn said. “She stopped by the door, talking to that naturalist.”

Frowning, I scanned the rooftops.

Everything was so still.

Too still.

The nearly-full moon had given everything a hazy blue glow. I inhaled deeply then exhaled slowly. The palms of my hands and the bottom of my feet started to get a tingly feeling. I scanned the roofs as I squeezed my hand into a fist, fighting off the terrible prickling sensation.

“Quinn,” I whispered.

“What’s wrong, Clem?”

“I don’t know. Something is about to—” My words were cut short by the sound of a loud explosion below. I looked back. Orange flames were

shooting up to the sky from what was left of an auto. Burning pieces of coal shot out of the machine.

The assembled crowd below screamed.

I looked at Quinn, both of us thinking the same thing: that was no accident.

A moment later, another auto burst into flame.

And then, from the direction of the Thames, I heard a howl.

Below, the guild members ran from the fiery explosions. Some hurried out of the courtyard and back toward the city. Others raced back inside.

I watched as dark shapes began moving across the rooftops toward us. The shadowed forms silhouetted by the light of the moon were unmistakable. And if one couldn't decide just by the shape, it was the eyes that told the tale. Red as rubies, the werewolves' eyes glimmered in the moonlight.

"Hells bells," I whispered.

Quinn's informant had told him a wolf would be at Guildhall tonight and that Professor Jamison was the target.

"Not a wolf. A pack," I said.

"Complications. Always complications," Quinn said with a huff then set aside his rifle. "Professor Jamison went back inside."

"Well, let's go get her before someone murders her," I said.

Quinn sighed. "And here I thought it was going to be an easy job."

"When is it ever easy?"

He shook his head, pulled out his pistol, then we turned and raced across the rooftop.

One of the wolves closest to Guildhall howled loudly, hurrying the rest of the pack along.

“Dammit,” I cursed then pumped my legs hard, racing across the tiles to the ladder at the side of the building, Quinn right behind me.

I descended quickly then raced across the square toward the entrance of Guildhall. Behind me, people screamed, calling for the constables, for a surgeon. I looked back over my shoulder. At least two people lay injured on the ground. The distinguished guild members fled in panic.

Quinn and I raced to the door of Guildhall. The entire place was in a tizzy. From somewhere on an upper floor, I heard the sound of breaking glass.

“Where did she go?” I asked, looking around.

Quinn grabbed a guild member wearing a purple ascot. “Professor Jamison?”

“What? What’s happening?”

“Where is Professor Jamison?” Quinn asked again, giving the man a shake.

“I...I don’t know. I lost her in the crowd. Maybe in the Alchemist’s Hall?”

“Where?”

“Fifth door. Right.”

Turning, Quinn and I pushed through the crowd, searching for the alchemist as we went.

From outside, we heard another explosion followed by a series of howls.

And then, the first scream.

“Bloody bold,” Quinn said. “All this for one mark? What in the hell are they up to?”

“Good question.” He was right. The packs *were* getting more intrepid. This was the fourth attack in the last two months. The packs were snagging

some of London's most learned scholars, and even our most reliable informants were being tight-lipped. Only because of Quinn's good connections with the Lolita pack had we known about tonight.

But we had never expected this.

A single wolf? Yes. A full force assault? No.

I pushed open the door to the Alchemist's Hall. Inside, four members—including Professor Jamison—turned to stare, their eyes wide with fear.

"Professor Jamison, come with us. You're in danger here—" The window exploded in a shower of glass.

"Clemenly, get her out of here," Quinn yelled then pulled his pistols and took aim.

I grabbed the befuddled alchemist by the arm as Quinn fired.

"What's happening?" the woman shrieked.

A werewolf bashed through the window. The monster, not fully man, not entirely wolf, stood on two feet. He had a maw full of long teeth. His body, a mass of muscle, covered in large patches of silvery fur, was a terrifying sight to behold.

Professor Jamison screamed. The other alchemists cowered in the corner.

The wolf looked from me to Quinn then laughed.

"Red Capes," he snarled then dropped down on his front legs. Tensing his muscles, he leaped at Quinn.

My partner firmed his stance then took his shot.

The wolf yelped loudly then crashed to the ground.

Wolves. Strong, but not very bright. Especially not the newly minted pack members. For some reason, they thought the lupine infection made them invincible. It extended their lives, but no matter how old a werewolf was, silver was their enemy. Silver could end them.

From somewhere else in the building, I heard another window break. There was a commotion in the hallway outside. I heard the telltale sound of screams and the gruff sounds of wolves. I frowned at the door. No getting out in that direction.

“Professor Jamison, we need to go,” I said then pulled her toward the broken window.

The other guild members, blind to the danger, opened the door and fled in terror. Smoke billowed into the room.

“Quinn, they’ve set the bloody place on fire.”

“Dammit.”

My boots crunching on the glass, I guided the professor out of the broken window, and we headed into the alleyway behind Guildhall.

Quinn, both pistols at the ready, leaped from the window, his red cape billowing around him. He raced to catch up with us.

“What’s happening?” the professor asked.

“Do lower your voice. They have excellent hearing,” I warned.

“We had a tip someone might be coming for you tonight. It appears the informant was right,” Quinn added.

“Informant? What are you talking about? What was that creature?”

“You don’t want to know,” Quinn answered.

As we turned the corner, we heard a series of howls coming from Guildhall. Apparently, they’d figured out we had gotten away with their quarry. We needed to get somewhere safe. Fast.

“Threadneedle?” I said, referring to the Red Cape Society meeting place below The Bank of England.

“No. They’ll expect us to go there. Saint Paul’s. Let’s get the professor on holy ground. We’ll take the tram from there.”

I nodded, and we turned and rushed in the direction of Saint Paul's Cathedral.

"I don't understand what's happening," Professor Jamison said as she hurried along with us as we raced down the street. "Why would anyone be after me? I'm just an alchemist."

"I think you answered your own question," Quinn said.

A series of barks and howls rose from behind us.

Again, the palms of my hands began to itch.

"They're close," I said.

Quinn and I stopped.

I turned and looked behind me. Two wolves, their eyes blazing red, loped down the street in our direction.

I pulled my pistol and took a shot. The beast leaped sideways, bouncing off the wall of a building then back onto the street again. I closed my right eye and took aim once more, aiming with the left eye which was always sharper.

I pulled the trigger.

This time, my shot hit home.

The wolf yelped then fell.

The other werewolf grabbed onto a lamppost and swung himself overhead, landing in front of us.

Quinn shot.

The bullet went wide.

Pulling out my dagger, I grabbed the professor, pushing her behind me.

I lunged at the werewolf. My silver blade connected with the wolf's shoulder.

The monster shrieked and pulled away, grabbing his shoulder in pain. He glared at me. "Little Red," he growled.

Little Red. I almost liked that the packs had a nickname for me. Given my petite size, they'd initially underestimated me, taunting me as "Little Red." But they soon learned that my petite size only made me a faster, smaller target. Now, four years later and with more than one pelt under my belt, the once-comical moniker was now one that evoked fear.

With the beast distracted, Quinn took his shot.

The monster yelped in agony when the silver bullet slammed into his chest.

He dropped.

"Lupercal pack," Quinn said with a frown. "What's got them all riled up?"

"I don't know, but we need to go."

Quinn nodded, and we hurried on our way.

"Last week it was Whitechapel," Quinn said as we raced toward the cathedral.

"Whitechapel and Lupercal working together? *That* is a problem."

"*That* is an understatement."

We ran down the streets until the dome on Saint Paul's was in sight. Moving through the shadows, we headed toward the back of the church until we reached the garden gate. I unlatched it and motioned for the professor to head inside.

But once more, a familiar tingle made the palms of my hands itch.

"Quinn," I cautioned.

A moment later, a massive werewolf dropped off a rooftop and landed in front of us.

I suppressed a gasp. This was no pack grunt. Fenton was a beta, leader of the Lupercal pack, one of the oldest packs in London. There were few

older or stronger werewolves in the realm. And this wasn't the first time we'd tangled.

"Fenton," Quinn said good-naturedly, training his pistols on the beast. "What can the Red Cape Society do for you this fine evening?"

"Give me the professor," the wolf said with a snarl.

Quinn looked over his shoulder at me. "Get her inside."

Werewolves could not cross onto holy ground, at least not while shifted into werewolf form, or even partially shifted as Fenton was tonight. As men, they could enter a sacred space, but it pained them greatly. I eyed the cathedral then the werewolf. Taking the professor by the arm, I moved us both toward the open garden gate.

Fenton took a step toward us, glaring at me.

Quinn clicked his tongue at the beast. "Not so fast. The guns are loaded, after all."

"Give her here, Little Red," Fenton growled at me.

"Now, why would I do that?"

"'Cause you're going to pay if you don't."

My dagger in front of me, the professor behind me, I moved us slowly toward the gate. Fenton's ruby red eyes watched each step.

Each of us sized up the other.

Each of us calculated.

Almost there.

The wolf might be able to pull it off if he jumped now—

"Clem, watch out," Quinn yelled as the beast leaped toward me.

I pushed the professor hard—she stumbled forward into the garden—then crouched, waiting. As the beast jumped over me, I rose and heaved him sideways, my dagger connecting with his arm.

Fenton turned and righted himself. More angry than hurt, he lunged at me once more.

Quinn shot, but Fenton moved away in time.

A door at the back of the cathedral squeaked as it opened. The professor was safely inside. Holy ground. Out of the wolf's reach.

Howling in frustration, Fenton turned back to Quinn and me.

"You'll pay for this," he said through a mouth full of razor-sharp teeth. He held his forearm. Dark blood oozed from between his fingers. Turning, he leaped onto a nearby roof, the moonlight casting a glow on him as he disappeared back into the city.

While I was used to werewolf macho posturing, as it seemed almost a prerequisite side effect of the lupine infection, his words chilled me to the bone.

CHAPTER 2: THE WEREWOLVES OF LONDON

PROFESSOR JAMISON SAT IN STUNNED silence as we headed back across town to headquarters. Even Quinn seemed unusually quiet. Something about tonight was different. Something about this whole case was different. Why were the werewolves snatching up scholars? This was not their usual beat. The deep malice in Fenton's words shook me. That werewolf had frequently crossed paths with Quinn and me, and one of these days, one of us was going to do in the other. But this time, something more was afoot. Fenton had seemed almost desperate. And a desperate werewolf was a very dangerous thing. As we made our way to headquarters, my mind drifted back to my first altercation with Fenton.

I was just a rookie when I first encountered the beta of Luprecal pack and Cyril, the realm's alpha. The local constables had come to the Red Cape Society for help with cleaning up an underground fighting ring. Every time one of the Bow Street Boys tried to get involved, he turned up missing. There were whispers about an unbeatable fighter who seemed to have super-human strength. The Bow Street Runners were spooked.

"I'm not surprised," Quinn had said with a nonchalant shrug. "This is just the kind of hustle the werewolves would try to pull. They're strong, but not creative."

Following Bow Street's leads, Quinn and I set out on the case. Thus far I had been chasing down wolves trying to rob liquor shipments or had done surveillance, but this case would have me at the heart of the realm's werewolf problem.

Quinn and I stopped under the dim glow of a gaslamp in what felt like the back alley of a back alley of a back alley in the heart of the fog-drenched city. Rats squeaked as they searched for food in the darkness. We were deep in the heart of the city. Hell, I hadn't even seen a whore loitering on a street corner for at least three blocks. My skin prickled with goosebumps. Werewolves were not the only things living in this dark zone. What else watched from the blackened windows, I didn't know. But I could feel the presence of the otherworld.

"Here," Quinn said, motioning to the alley. "Third door. The arena is below the city," he added as he opened his bag. "Take off your cape."

Frowning, I pulled off my red cloak and shoved it into Quinn's satchel.

"Underground is a bad idea," I told him.

"Everything about this job is a bad idea. If the wolves don't get us, we'll have to be on the lookout for cutthroats, murderers, and rapists."

"Or whatever else is creeping around," I said, scanning the windows.

"Yeah," Quinn said with a long breath. "Lots of little spots like this in the city. Makes your skin crawl."

"Do any of the preternatural like us?"

Quinn chuckled lightly. "Not many."

"Fabulous."

"All right. We go in. We watch. Nothing else," he said then pulled up a hood, shadowing his face. "And hopefully, no one recognizes me, or we'll have to fight our way out of the basement of doom. The packs haven't marked you just yet. You get to do the talking," he said then handed a coin purse to me.

"Basement of doom," I repeated with a chuckle then looked at the bag. "And just what am I supposed to do with this?"

"Bet. We need to blend in."

I sighed. "All right."

With a nod, Quinn led me down the narrow alley, slipping between two buildings where there was barely enough space to walk. We made our way to the third door. It was slightly ajar. Standing just inside was a hulking man who eyed us as we approached.

There was a distinct feral scent in the air. Werewolves. Lots of them. Including the man at the door who reeked of the musky odor.

"What do you want?" the werewolf snarled at me.

"Good evening to you too. I hear this is a good place to play a hand of whist."

"Whist?" the man said with a snort. "Get out of here, lady."

I rolled my eyes. Was he really that daft? I pulled out my coin purse. "Not much for subterfuge, are you? All right then, how about I've come to bet on an illegal fight and I have money?"

The werewolf looked from the bag to me. "You're new. We don't like new around here."

"Rather limiting the potential audience, aren't you? We all have our hesitations. I understand. For example, you smell bad. I don't like men who smell bad, but you don't see me complaining. Listen, I might have heard about the fight at the Mushroom. I do enjoy a good bloodletting. I'm here to bet."

The werewolf grunted. "You talk too much."

"And you're far too slow," I said, rolling my eyes. "Come along, my darling. Let's go." Taking Quinn's hand, I gave Quinn my best flirtatious smile and led him inside.

Annoyed with me, and not remotely interested in who my beau might be, the werewolf barely gave Quinn a passing glance.

Quinn and I headed in. As we wound down the narrow stairwell, I heard the sound of cheering and yelling from below. The stench of the place, musty due to the damned near Roman age of the building, reeking feral from the wolves, and tinged with the scents of sweat and blood, was gag-worthy.

“At least they do a good job with upkeep on the place,” I said with a soft chuckle.

Quinn snorted. “I don’t think I’ve ever seen you try to flirt before.”

“How did I do?”

“I couldn’t tell if you were trying to give me a sultry smile or if you had gas.”

“Very funny. It fooled the wolf.”

“Yeah, nothing gets by that guy,” Quinn said with a laugh.

I winked at Quinn.

“Clem, your eye okay? You’re not having a seizure, are you?”

“Oh my god, shut it.”

When we reached the bottom of the stairs, we found two more werewolves keeping watch on the crowd. They gave us a passing glance but didn’t say anything. I eyed the surroundings. Throngs of people surrounded a pit dug into the ground. Yelling and cheering, they pushed one another as they tried to get a better view of the fight below.

My eyes danced across the room. The average observer would be unlikely to detect the differences between werewolves and humans, but Quinn had taught me all the telltale signs. That, and even before I’d been recruited into the society, I always had a sense for the unusual. Before the Society, I hadn’t known what I’d been sensing. Now, I knew the truth. The realm was full of the unhuman: werewolves, goblins, vampires, and even the occasional fae—or so I was told; I hadn’t met any myself. The

preternatural lurked just below our awareness. And it was the job of the Red Cape Society to keep them in check.

From my initial sweep, it appeared that about three-fourths of the room was human, the rest were werewolves.

There was a strange roar from the pit below followed by a loud grunt.

Quinn and I looked at one another then pushed our way through the crowd. Fighting through the mass of arms and jabbing elbows, we finally found a spot along the rail overlooking the pit. Below, a man and a bear were in a fierce duel.

“Hells bells,” I whispered under my breath.

The sweaty fighter, who was human as far as I could tell, recoiled to his side of the pit. There was a long scratch across his chest that was bleeding profusely. On the other side of the pit, a bear paced, watching the man carefully. The fighter wiped his nose with his fist then went at the bear once more.

The massive creature reared up on its hind legs then swiped at the man. The man ducked, bashing the poor animal in the ribs. Rather than rebounding, however, the beast swiped. His paw connected with the man’s head and tossed him to the side.

Losing his footing, the man tumbled into the wall, hitting the old stones hard. He swooned for a minute then dropped.

Someone gonged a bell.

Half the crowd cheered. The other half groaned.

“Five minutes until the next match. Tom the Blade versus Fenton,” a man at the back of the room called.

The crowd shuffled off to make their bets or collect their winnings.

I stared down at the pit. The bear, which was wearing a harness attached to a chain, had been reeled back so two strong men could retrieve

the unconscious and bleeding fighter lying in the pit. Once he'd been pulled back, they prodded the bear with blazing irons back into a cage.

"I feel sick," I whispered to Quinn.

Quinn nodded but didn't say anything.

I scanned the room. Across the pit from Quinn and me was a set of stone steps leading into the arena. The area around the stairs had been blocked off. A dark hallway led away from the steps, deeper into the basement. I watched as two men appeared from the back. One was shirtless, his hands taped. He had long, silver hair, and had stripped down to his trousers and boots. A sour look on his face, he nodded as he listened to the man walking beside him. If the fighter was massive, the man walking next to him was a giant. With head full of red hair and a neck thick around as my waist, I wasn't sure I'd ever seen such a massive creature before. And, of course, both were not truly men but werewolves.

"The red-headed tree trunk is Cyril," Quinn whispered almost inaudibly in my ear.

Cyril. Cyril was the realm's alpha. I had heard his name over and over again, but never saw him in the flesh. He loomed over all the others in the room. The agency records said he was at least five hundred years old, maybe older. And he'd been alpha since the seventeenth century.

"Fenton is the fighter," Quinn added. Fenton was Cyril's right hand. Fenton was the beta of Luprecal pack, one of the strongest packs in London.

I scanned the room. Both humans and werewolves were placing their bets.

A second man appeared near the steps close to Fenton. He had a scar stretching from his ear to the corner of his mouth. Also stripped down to a pair of trousers, I could see his ripple of muscles. He was strong and wiry, a

good match in a fight against such a hulking brute, but not a good match against a werewolf.

Lifting the money pouch Quinn had given me, I grinned.

“And what are you up to?” Quinn asked.

“Making a bet, of course.”

Quinn rolled his eyes but followed along behind me.

We crossed the room to the bookmaker. I listened as the others made their bets. The werewolves were all betting on the Luprecal beta. The others, judging the wiry fighter more likely to win as I had, were betting on the human.

“Five on Fenton,” I said, setting down my money.

“That old tree trunk? Nah. You’re wasting your money, Miss. Tom the Blade will have him down in no time,” another man placing his own wager told me.

I shrugged. “We’ll see.”

I made my bet, took my ticket, then turned back to Quinn who looked decidedly calm considering we were deep in enemy territory. With a nod, we headed back to the pit. We’d just got into position when a gong clanged, and the fighters descended into the arena. Just off the pit, behind iron bars, the bear roared. The sound of it nearly broke my heart. Bear baiting was illegal, but here, in the midst of the werewolves, the creature’s presence seemed doubly odious.

The ringmaster came to the side of the pit. “Fenton versus Tom the Blade,” he called.

The crowd cheered.

I eyed the werewolf. How the others failed to see the unhuman gleam in his eyes, I didn’t know. But it was there, the flash of red that was always in the depths. I scanned the room. While the humans outnumbered the

wolves, the werewolves could take this place in heartbeat. It would be over before it started. But bloodshed wasn't what the wolves were after. This was a hustle. The werewolves were here for the money.

Once again, the gong clanged. "Fight!" the ringmaster called.

Fenton and Tom the Blade moved toward one another. I watched as they circled one another. Both were excellent fighters. After a few feints, the fight began in earnest. The screaming around me began as the bidders cheered for their champion. My eyes went to Cyril. This was the big bad wolf of London. Right there. He sat surrounded by bodyguards, all wolves, watching Fenton take a pummeling. His heavy brow furrowed as he surveyed the scene. Running the numbers quickly in my head, I realized that Cyril was going to make a killing from Fenton's inevitable win.

The sound of flesh and bone cracking interrupted my thoughts.

I turned back to the fight in time to see Tom the Blade fly across the pit, hit the wall, and tumble to the ground.

"Knockout," the ringmaster called.

"Christ, is he dead?" a woman screamed.

Fenton smirked as he looked on, stopping to spit some blood.

An attendant rushed to Tom the Blade, putting his finger's to the man's neck.

The room stilled.

"Alive. Bring the surgeon though. His eye is out," the man called.

To my horror, the room erupted in cheers.

"Come on," Quinn said, gently taking my arm.

We moved through the crowd to the bookmaker once more. I collected my winnings. Over my shoulder, I watched as they carried Tom the Blade out on a stretcher. One of the men was holding Tom's eye in place.

"Next fight, Loki the bear versus Fenton," the ringmaster called.

“He’s going to fight the bear?” I asked, turning back to look. While I couldn’t see into the pit, I could hear the sound of chains rattling and the bear’s cage opening.

I looked up at Quinn.

“We need to go,” Quinn whispered.

“Ain’t you gonna bet?” the bookmaker asked, moving the cigar perched between his lips from side to side.

“I do like the bear. Cuddly fellow,” I replied.

The man laughed. “Oh yeah, real cuddly. No one has taken out old Loki yet. That bear has killed five men.”

“I think I’ll sit this one out,” I said, stuffing my winnings—which were about the same as a week’s salary at the agency—back into my bag.

“There is no way I’m going to let that wolf beat a bear to death. Did you see what he did to that man?” I whispered to Quinn.

Quinn nodded then took me by the arm, leading me into a dark corner then pulling me close. To the average observer, we’d look like a pair holed up for a quick cuddle before the next match.

“There are seventeen wolves in here, including the beta and the alpha. If we make a move, we’ll die,” Quinn whispered.

“We don’t need to kill anyone. We just need to end the fight.”

“All right. Suggestions?”

“I have a new toy from tech,” I said with a grin. “Notice those old wood pipes on the wall? The ones dripping water? You can swim, can’t you?”

Quinn sighed. “How did I ever get landed with you?”

“Luck,” I said with a smirk.

The bell gonged indicating the fight was about to begin. As the crowd gathered around, Quinn and I moved toward the pipes along the wall. I dug

into my bag as nonchalantly as possible and pulled out the small clockwork device therein. The small detonator, designed to punch a hole through a wall, would do the trick. I leaned against the wall and set the device, turning the gears until I detected the almost inaudible click.

I nodded to Quinn. “Let’s go.”

Quinn and I turned and headed back upstairs, passing the guards who paid us no mind whatsoever. Once we were outside, Quinn motioned for me to stop. We stood waiting in the alley just outside. I lifted my hand and counted down on my fingers: 5—4—3—2—1.

From below, there was a loud popping sound. The building shuddered. A moment later, screams erupted from below along with the telltale sound of rushing water.

“That will flush them out. Let’s go get the Bow Street Runners. They can sort it out from here,” Quinn said.

“But the bear.”

“The bear?”

“Yeah, the bear. He’s all chained up. He could drown. We need to go back and get him.”

“Clemenly, that pit will soon be full of wet, pissed off werewolves. And something tells me the bear is not going to thank you either. We need to go. Now.”

“You don’t know that. Maybe he’s a shapeshifter. Either way, that animal doesn’t deserve to die in there—not drown nor be beaten to death by a werewolf.”

Quinn gave me a half-amused, half-annoyed look.

I motioned to the fire escape on the building at the end of the alley. “We go up, and we wait until the crowd clears. After they’re all out, we get the bear then get the hell out of here.”

“By then it will be flooded in there.”

“Maybe. We can head back in now, if you want.”

Quinn sighed. “Fine. But I’m not swimming to save a bear that’s just going to maul me to death.”

I grinned. “All right.”

Moving quickly, Quinn and I headed up the fire escape to the rooftop from which we had a good vantage point. A few moments later, the crowd filtered out of the door, heading down the alleyway in both directions. Wolves and humans looking equally wet and annoyed at the sudden interruption of their fun hurried on their way. We waited until the crowd dispersed then headed back down. As we did so, Quinn handed me my cape.

“Pull your gun, and get out that big-ass knife you always carry.”

Grinning, I latched my cape at the neck then pulled out my silver blade, a gift from my grand-mère.

Quinn and I headed back inside. Moving quickly, we worked through the space which was unnervingly quiet. Our weapons drawn, we made our way down the steps back into the room. No one was around. Water gushed from the pipe. The floor was soaked, and the pit was full of water. As I suspected, the bear was still inside. He was treading water but was already at the end of his chain. He roared for help then whimpered.

“Goddamned wolves,” I said then went to the side of the pit. Lying on my stomach, I reached for the chain holding the bear. The animal, sensing I was not there to get into a fisticuffs with him, watched me carefully. Grabbing the chain, I gave it a gentle tug, pulling the bear toward me. Running on survival instinct, the bear drifted toward me.

“That’s it,” I whispered. “Come on, Loki. No tricks today. Just let me unhook that pin,” I said, reaching for the bear’s collar.

A moment later, however, I heard voices coming from the back.

“I don’t care if you can’t swim, get the bloody till or I’ll rip your throat out,” someone roared angrily.

“Clem, that’s Cyril. We need to go,” Quinn said.

“Almost got him,” I whispered, reaching out with the tips of my fingers for the bear’s collar.

“Clem.”

The bear let out a soft whine.

“Come on, Loki. It’s now or never,” I told the animal, looking into his brown eyes.

The bear swam closer to me. I grabbed the collar and pulled the pin. The binding let loose, and the collar and chain drifted underwater.

“What a fucking mess. We’re going to have to move the venue,” someone said.

“Stop talking and get the till.”

I scrambled up quickly and headed toward the door where I met Quinn who was already on the first step.

“What the... Jesus, will you look at that? Red Capes,” someone said.

I looked over my shoulder to see Fenton and Cyril standing there, both of them glaring in our direction.

“Explains our plumbing problems,” Cyril said with a sneer. There was a slight lilt in his voice, a hint of what might have once been an Irish accent worn thin over time. While he was still in human form, his eyes were glowing a menacing red. “Who’s the girl?”

Fenton laughed. “They gave Quinn a schoolgirl for a new partner. Shame about Morrison. I *almost* liked that Red Cape. Now look what Quinn has, a wee Little Red for a partner. Where did they find you, Little Red, boarding school?”

Both werewolves chuckled.

I glared at them.

Quinn aimed his pistols on the men. “Go,” he whispered to me.

“Not on your life,” I replied, aiming my weapon at Cyril.

“Gentlemen, it’s been an illuminating evening. *Little Red* and I will be leaving now,” Quinn told the werewolves.

“Hey,” I protested.

“After the mess you’ve made? Sorry, Quinn. Not this time. Pity about the girl though. She’s not hard to look at. Maybe we should turn her,” Cyril said then nodded to Fenton who began to quickly shift form.

“Clemenly, run,” Quinn said.

A moment later, Fenton—fully shifted into werewolf form—jumped toward us. I was shocked to see he could span the entire room in one leap. I turned my gun toward him and was about to fire when I heard a roar. Loki burst from the water and knocked Fenton into the wall. The werewolf hit his head hard. Shaking his head, he seemed dazed.

“You idiot! Get up. Go after them,” Cyril yelled.

Taking our chance, Quinn and I turned and raced toward the exit. Fighting London’s alpha and a beta in the open was one thing, but tangling with the two in a mostly-submerged underground fighting pit was something quite different. Rushing back outside, we raced down the alley. I heard a grunt and looked behind me to see the bear—but not a werewolf—hot on our heels.

“Loki, come on,” I called to the bear then we turned and headed back into the busy London streets.

“I swear to god, Clemenly, if I get killed because you wanted to save a bear, I’ll have you demoted to clerical.”

“If you get killed you won’t be doing much of anything. And my bear just saved your life.”

“Your bear?”

“Yes, my bear,” I said then looked back at Loki who was trailing quickly behind Quinn and me. I grinned and motioned for him to follow us. Running fast, we turned a corner and burst out into a main thoroughfare.

“Black Circle Station. We’ll send the Bow Street Boys to mop up the mess,” Quinn said.

A woman screamed when she spotted the bear following us.

I whistled to him. “Loki, come here.” Holding out my hand, I waited for the bear. The creature caught up with us then rubbed his head against my hand. “There you go. Good bear. You’re all right now. Come on, let’s go,” I said then turned back to Quinn.

Grinning, Quinn shook his head. “You’re going to be the death of me.”

“Me or the wolves?”

“I was talking to the bear.”

At that, I laughed. “And here they told me you were the most fierce werewolf hunter in the realm.”

Quinn smirked, but there was a flash of pride behind his eyes. “I am. Fighting bears is something altogether different. All right, partner—and bear. Come on.”

When we finally reached headquarters, we led Professor Jamison inside then sent a junior agent to fetch Agent Greystock, our superior. Quinn sighed heavily then flopped into a high-back leather chair, setting his pistols on the nearby table. He closed his eyes and tipped his head back. He yawned tiredly. It was going to be a very, very long night.

“You need something to help you unwind. Why don’t you and Jessica come out with me this weekend, get a little recreation?”

“Come out with you where?”

“The Hippodrome.”

Quinn laughed. “Miss your bear?”

“Yes. I’m still mad that Agent Greystock wouldn’t let me keep him.”

“And just what were you going to do with a bear, anyway? It’s not like you have space at Miss Colridge’s.”

“No, but maybe he could have stayed at headquarters. He could have been our mascot.”

Quinn shook his head. “What did you ever do with those fight winnings?”

“Tracked down Tom the Blade at the hospital, and paid for him to get a glass eye.”

Quinn shook his head. “Only you, Clemeney. I think Jess and I will pass, but thanks.”

“Well, I’ll be sure to tell Loki you send your greetings.”

Quinn chuckled. “You do that, partner. You do that.”

CHAPTER 3: CURIUSER AND CURIUSER

AGENT GREYSTOCK PACED THE MEETING ROOM. She tapped her fingers together as she walked, her lips pulled into two tight lines, her silver hair combed back into a tight bun. She wore a suit that was the same scarlet color as our capes. I eyed her hair, wondering if her tightly coiffed locks made her head ache.

Quinn and I waited patiently as Agent Greystock considered.

She turned back to the board at the front of the meeting room. On it were photographs or sketches of the guild members who had gone missing thus far. Initially, the abductions had gone unnoticed by the Society. It was only at the last kidnapping that one of the wolves had been spotted by the Bow Street boys. When the London authorities noticed the preternatural, we were called in. As usual, Quinn and I had been landed with a problem. We already knew the wolves were up to something. They'd been raiding and robbing for weeks. But we'd thought they'd been prepping for a big heist or preparing to run guns. After the raid on Guildhall, now we weren't so sure. We'd been at it all night into morning trying to come up with a plausible theory. Nothing seemed right.

"Casualties from the incident at Guildhall?" Agent Greystock asked, turning to junior Agent Harper, who'd been part of the clean-up crew.

"Two," Agent Harper said. "A driver killed in the explosion of a coal-powered auto and a valet who took a head injury."

"Anyone reported missing?"

"No, ma'am, but Guildhall's Secretary of Records reported that his office had been looted. A number of new patent requests, some schematics, and the registry of Guildhall members are among the documents missing," Agent Harper said.

Agent Greystock stared at the faces on the board.

“Oliver Dart, tinker,” she said, tapping the photo. “Mavis Porter, naturalist. Toby Winston, alchemist. Neville McKee, alchemist. Byrony Paxton, professor from King’s College.”

Agent Greystock turned to us. “Theories?”

Quinn shook his head. “This isn’t the packs’ usual *modus operandi*. Brawling? Whoring? Sure. But not this.”

“Wolves have no reason to lift these people,” Agent Harper said. “And documents? I mean, I didn’t know the wolves could read.”

I grinned at Agent Harper. “Templar pack can read, but they’re the only ones,” I said then turned back to the board. “Whitehall pack and Lupercal pack can’t stand each other. If they’re working together, they’re about to pull off something big.”

Agent Greystock nodded then looked back at the board. “Why these guild members—and Professor Jamison—in particular? Why them and the patents?”

We all stared at the board.

“Ransom?” Agent Harper offered. “Or to sell the schematics on the black market.”

Neither idea seemed bad enough.

“Weapons,” Quinn suggested. “Maybe...maybe they’re pulling minds together to build weapons.”

“A good a theory as any, for the moment,” Agent Greystock said with a nod. “Quinn, I want you to go back to your contact with the Lolitas. Backtrack and see what you can find out.”

Quinn nodded, but I could see he wasn’t pleased to be assigned the task. No doubt Jessica didn’t care much for her husband hanging around with a bunch of tarty bitches at a brothel. But many years ago, before I’d joined

the Society, something had happened to Alodie, the beta bitch of the Lolitas, and Quinn had been the one to get her out of trouble. Ever since, she was partial to him.

“Agent Harper, I want you to go interview Professor Jamison. We had her moved to the safehouse on the Isle of Dogs. See what she knows about the missing guild members, and find out what she’s been working on.”

“Yes, ma’am.”

“Very good. Off with you both. Agent Louvel, please come with me.”

I nodded then turned to Quinn. “Ales and Ass, three o’clock,” I said, referring to our favorite pub.

He inclined his head to me then headed out.

“Come along,” Agent Greystock said, motioning for me to follow her from the meeting room. The halls of the Red Cape Society headquarters were busy. Other agents wearing the distinctive red cloak and silver badge passed me by, giving me a congenial nod as they went on their way. Unbeknownst to most of those living in the city of London, there were many things in our realm that did more than go bump in the night. It was the duty of the Red Cape Society, part of Her Majesty’s Secret Intelligence Service, to deal with the preternatural.

Agent Greystock led me to the lift. Motioning for me to follow her inside, she pulled a lever, and we descended below the city.

“You are right that Whitechapel and Lupercal are not inclined to get along. If someone is uniting the packs for a singular purpose, then we must learn what it is,” Agent Greystock said.

“You think Quinn is right? That they’re building arms?”

Agent Greystock tapped her fingers together. “The guild members they are gathering are great minds, but they are not the best weapons designers in the realm. Thus far, I see no connection between them.”

“Alchemists. Tinkers. Naturalists. At best, they are constructing a heinous alternative to opium. At worst, alchemical concoctions can be weaponized,” I suggested.

“Do you really think the wolves capable of such ingenuity?”

I shook my head. She was right. The packs were strong, but with the exception of the Templars, not that bright. This was well beyond their capacity for creativity. The only thing they were ever good at was brute mayhem.

“Cyril is not the most peaceful alpha this realm has ever known, but he’s no worse than the human gangs. This...smacks of something else. We need to find out what,” Agent Greystock said.

“Cyril is old. Do you suppose nature has begun her call for a rival? If the balance of power is tipping, we have a very big problem on our hands. If the packs are about to compete for alpha, gaming and petty theft would become the least of our problems.”

Agent Greystock sighed heavily. “For all their machismo, the wolves are secretive, particularly in these matters. We need someone to talk, and not just Lolitas. They only talk to Quinn because of Alodie, and the she-wolves never have a say in pack matters. You need to talk to Lionheart.”

I groaned.

Agent Greystock laughed. “Yes, I know, but Sir Richard Spencer—Lionheart—and the Templars will be the pack least interested in dealing with a new alpha or getting involved in any trouble that disturbs Her Majesty. They are royalist to a fault, and they are content with things the way they are. And, I think, that werewolf likes you.”

“You say that like it’s a compliment.”

“Clemenly, I have advised dozens of agents on your beat over the years. Sir Richard has never talked to anyone but you.”

Lionheart, as they commonly called Sir Richard Spencer, the beta of the Templar pack, was a scholarly and reclusive werewolf, as was his pack. Their origins in the realm were ancient, but they had never made a grab for power. The Templars kept to themselves and their own business, which made them both easy to ignore and entirely dangerous. Secrets and werewolves never blended well. But there was good cause to go see him.

“Byrony Paxton was a professor from King’s College,” I said, referring to one of the names on the board. The Templar pack had made the halls of the ivory tower of King’s College their home. I often wondered how the students might feel if they learned half a dozen of their professors were werewolves.

“Perhaps that will be enough of an opening to get Lionheart to talk.”

The lift came to a stop. Agent Greystock slid open the metal gate and led me down the narrow, cavernous hallway, pushing open the door to the armory. Inside, a team of smiths was working busily on new devices and tech intended for the defense of Her Majesty’s realm.

“Why abduct tinkers? If the wolves are looking for brilliant minds to make monstrous devices, all they really need to do is to raid us,” I said.

“Let’s not pose the idea to them, shall we?” Agent Greystock said with a smirk then led me to the back of a large workshop where a little man wearing goggles that seemed to magnify his eyes times ten was working hard on a clockwork device.

I chuckled. “What big eyes you have, sir.”

The old man paused his work and looked up at me. He blinked twice then grinned. “All the better to see you with, my dear.”

“Speaking of. Master Hart, do you have the device I commissioned for Agent Louvel?”

“Indeed I do,” the tinker said, pulling off his goggles. He rose and went to a line of shelves at the side of the room. He pulled out a wooden box and handed it to me. “Here you are. Try this.”

I opened the lid to find an eyepatch inside. The eyepatch, quite like what an unfortunate airship pirate might wear, was rigged with a number of clockwork devices and an unusual optic piece.

“What is it?” I asked.

“Come this way,” the tinker, Master Hart, said then led Agent Greystock and me to an adjoining room.

Once we were inside, the man closed the door.

“Slip it on, Agent. Over the left eye.”

I slid on the device, surprised when I could see through the optic. “Everything is shaded green,” I said.

“Right,” Master Hart said then went to the wall and turned off the gaslamp. “Agent Louvel, there is a lever located right around your temple. Please switch it on.”

I felt along the edge of the eyepatch until I felt a small metal lever, which I shifted in place. I heard a click as something in the eyepatch activated, and a moment later, a strange hue lit up the optic. Suddenly, even though the room was entirely dark, I could clearly make out Agent Greystock’s and Master Hart’s silhouettes.

“Hell’s bells,” I said, astonished.

Agent Greystock chuckled.

“I call it a night array optic. There is a small aether core with a crystal device used to amplify vision on multiple waves, including enhancing night vision. Based some of the tech off the Hawking Optic. All in all, it works well in perfect darkness. Still a few ghosts in the machine. Just ignore any

stray undefinables you might see. It will enhance your vision in the dark. As you requested, Agent Greystock.”

“Thank you,” she said. “How is it, Clemeney?”

“Perfect. At least now, I’ll see them coming. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. Very good. Lights, Master Hart.”

I turned off then removed the device just as Master Hart sparked the lamp back to life. I set the optic back into the box and put it in my bag.

“Thank you, sir,” I said to the tinker.

“Agent,” he said with a nod, looking pleased with himself.

Agent Greystock inclined her head to the man then waved for me to follow her. We headed down the hall away from the armory and workshop to the underground rail.

“How is your grandmother, Clemeney?” Agent Greystock asked.

“Very well, madame. Thank you for asking. She inquires after you every time I see her.”

“Dear Felice. Please send her my greetings.”

“I will. You should come by and see her.”

Agent Greystock smiled. “Are you sure about that? Every time I drop in, she insists I find you a husband. She has set out a rather specific list of requirements. She’s quite convinced that if I just hire the right person into the agency, all her problems—or are they yours?—will be solved.”

I laughed. “Oh, yes. There is no limit to Grand-mère’s enthusiasm for that topic.”

“Well, I shall assure her that I am doing my best. We’ll let the blame fall on my shortcomings. Now, off to Lionheart. Clemeney, I don’t think I need to impress upon you the trouble that might be brewing if Cyril’s reign has come to an end.”

“No, madame. I understand.”

She nodded.

We came to the end of the hall where a small subterranean train waited. While the first such public rail systems were still being planned, the Society had been using a tram system in subterfuge since their invention by Archibald Boatswain in the late 1700s. Unbeknownst to most, the Society had a complete rail network under London.

I hated riding in the damned thing. All that lurching and rocking made me sick to my stomach. But I could hardly complain when my superior herself was loading me onto the train.

I slipped into the small compartment and adjusted the knobs on the dashboard. In theory, the machine would automatically adjust the switches along the rail and get me where I wanted to go. But I wondered what would happen if a rat or a rock got in the way. I had a terrible vision of myself hurtling out of the tunnel like a metal rocket, catapulting into the Thames.

Sitting down in the passenger seat, I harnessed the straps across my body. With a farewell wave to Agent Greystock, I pulled the lever. The door closed, a series of gears locking the door in place. The train began to vibrate, and I heard a loud whine. A moment later, the train compartment shot down the rail line. I closed my eyes and said a silent prayer in the hope that I wouldn't end up in the Thames today.

CHAPTER 4: LIONHEART

I STOOD OUTSIDE SIR RICHARD SPENCER'S OFFICE door in a narrow hall of the King's College classroom buildings for a solid three minutes, raising then lowering my hand. Killing werewolves? Easy. Trying to make nice? Not so much. Trying to make nice with a werewolf who was far too handsome for either of our good? Impossible.

I had finally decided it was time to get it over with when the door opened.

On the other side, dressed in a fine tweed suit and smoking a pipe, stood Sir Richard Spencer, or as he was called on the street, Lionheart. Our best records indicated he was approximately seven hundred years old. King Richard, from whom he'd earned his moniker, had knighted him. While he was a mere child compared to many of the vamps roaming about the realm, his age and wealth of knowledge—what he had seen, what he had survived—always astonished me. There was a reason the pack in this part of town was named Templar. These wolves had become afflicted during the crusades, which they truly believed was a blessing from God to complete their divine work. And, *thank God*, their philosophy on the subject left with them with a sense of honor and nationalism that often proved helpful.

Lionheart removed his pipe and looked at me over his reading spectacles.

"I was getting tired of waiting to see what you were going to do," he said. "How can I help you, Agent Louvel?"

"I'm here to talk."

"This is not the best time."

"I know it's a bit early, but—"

"You misunderstand me. This is not the best time to be seen with you."

“Then why don’t you let me in before someone sees me? I did bring Scotch,” I said, lifting the parcel.

Lionheart smirked, and not for the first time, I felt the dangerous charm in that grin. Given I was always partial to men with honor, a sharp mind, and yellow hair, Sir Richard Spencer was a problem. He was far too good-looking to be so very much off-limits.

“I thought you said it was early,” he replied.

“I have been awake since yesterday, so it’s actually night for me.”

The wolf looked at the bottle then back at me. “Very well,” he said then stepped aside so I could come inside, taking the bottle from my hand as I entered.

The office was lined from floor to ceiling with books, scrolls, artifacts, and maps. Everywhere I looked, I saw evidence that Lionheart was busy researching.

He pulled two glasses out of a cabinet and poured us both a drink. He handed a glass to me.

“God save the Queen,” he said, clinking his glass to mine.

“God save the Queen,” I said then took a swig.

“So, Agent Louvel, I assume you are here to talk about that mess at Guildhall,” he said, slipping into his chair behind his desk. He pulled off his spectacles and set them on the desk.

One thing about werewolves was that when they were in human form, they gave off a dangerous masculine air that was either highly repugnant or high intoxicating. Lionheart, of course, was of the latter. I was told that the she-wolves, especially when they were in season, were almost impossible to resist. Like most other wolves, Lionheart was all muscle under that scholarly attire. His form was very...intriguing.

I drove away the lusty thoughts that kept cropping up.

I really needed to find myself a man. Soon.

“You assume correctly. Perhaps you can illuminate me on why Lupercal and Whitechapel are working together, or maybe why they’ve been lifting Guildhall members.”

“Lupercal and Whitechapel are not working together.”

“Sorry?”

“You’re behind the news, *Little Red*.”

I frowned at him.

He chuckled. “I rather like the nickname. It suits you.”

“Suits me? Why? Because I’m petite or because I wear a red cape?”

“Neither.”

“Then why?”

“Because of how you smell.”

Okay. “And how do I smell?”

“Like red roses.”

I stared at him. The wolf smirked again then leaned forward and refilled both our cups.

I grinned. “I’m sure you say that to all the ladies. Well, that aside, tell me what I’m behind on.”

“*All* the London packs are working together, not just those two. Templar is uninterested. I had a rather difficult conversation with Cyril on the matter. But as I reminded him, we have our own project,” he said, tapping a very ragged book sitting on the desk in front of him. I noted the emblem of the Templars on the cover. “But the others... Well, it seems they’ve found a common interest.”

“That’s impossible. The packs never unite.”

“Untrue,” Lionheart said, lifting his glass. “We were united at least three times in the last seven hundred years.”

“Okay then, why?”

He sipped his drink once more, set the cup down, and then tapped his finger lightly on the rim. “I tell you what. You have dinner with me tonight, and I’ll tell you what I know.”

“That seems like an incredibly bad idea.”

“Why?”

“Because I smell like roses, and you have so much musk coming off you that I’m likely to do something I’ll regret in the morning.”

Lionheart chuckled. “Don’t tell me you’re afraid of the big bad wolf.”

“Not at all. I have silver bullets enough for that. But I don’t like complications. Thus far, I’ve managed to stay aboveboard. It’s better if it stays that way.”

Lionheart leaned back in his chair and sighed. “From your point of view, I suppose that makes sense.”

“Indeed it does. Is Cyril fading? Is that why the packs are rallying?”

Lionheart laughed. “No,” he said with a shake of the head. “If that was happening, it would be London 1666 all over again.”

“London 1666? The great fire?”

He nodded.

“Then what is happening? Why are they working together?”

“Since we were disinclined to get involved, I was left out on the particulars—though I was warned that I would be interested in due time. Shows how little they know of me. Pack nonsense. God has blessed us with the lupine affliction to fulfill our holy mission. I have no interest in Cyril’s agendas.”

“All the more reason to lend me a hand, no?” I said with a grin.

Lionheart chuckled lightly. “I’d rather stay out of the matter entirely, but I’m vexed with Cyril at the moment. I have a colleague here at King’s

College who is my squash partner. Lupercal lifted her two nights back.”

“Byrony Paxton?”

“Correct. No one asked my permission to remove Professor Paxton, and I’d prefer to have her back. Perhaps we can come to some arrangement?”

I raised an eyebrow at him. “I’m listening.”

“Indeed. What big ears you have, so to speak.”

I smirked. “All the better to hear you with, of course.”

“But you hear more than common senses permit, don’t you, Agent Louvel?”

I narrowed my eyes at him. How could he know anything about that sixth sense that guided me? I frowned. “All agents have uncommonly strong instincts.”

“Do they?”

“Yes.”

“But they don’t all smell like red roses.”

“I wouldn’t know.”

Lionheart grinned. “All right, Agent. We’ll come back to that another time. Now, if you go to this address at this hour, you will find some answers. I do recommend subterfuge. Perhaps take Agent Briarwood along,” he said, referring to Quinn. Lionheart scribbled down the address and slid the paper across the desk toward me. “I would consider it a favor if Professor Paxton was found and relocated somewhere safe until the Red Capes have this mess sorted out.”

“I’ll see what I can do,” I said then polished off the drink. I snatched up the note then rose. “Thank you for your help,” I said then went to the door.

“Agent Louvel, are you sure about dinner? Would it be so bad to stray from the path just a little?”

I reached for the handle then smiled over my shoulder at him. “I’m not so easily fooled, tempting as the offer may be. Goodbye, Sir Richard.”

“*Little Red*,” he said with a wink, lifting his glass in a toast to me.

My heart beating hard in my chest, I closed his office door behind me. I hurried down the hall and out of the building.

I really, really needed to find myself a man.

CHAPTER 5: TO GRANDMOTHER'S HOUSE

LEAVING KING'S COLLEGE, I TURNED and headed toward Saint Clement Danes. My grand-mère, who was the organist at the church, lived in a flat nearby. I called her my grand-mère, but we were not really related. I had been abandoned as a baby at the church, and the widow Louvel had taken me in. She'd named me after Saint Clement, the merciful. God knows I was always grateful for her mercy. I owed everything to my grand-mère who'd raised me.

I worked my way back up the Strand, passing the church, then headed to my grand-mère's flat. I gave the door a sharp rap. There was a rattle inside and a flurry of activity.

"Grand-mère?" I called. "It's me."

The ruckus stopped, and a moment later, the door opened.

"Clemenly? Oh my girl, come in, come in. Clemenly? What's wrong? Why are you here? I smell Scotch on you. Have you been drinking? It's not even lunchtime yet! Oh, oranges and lemons, Clemenly. Let me give you a kiss," she said, pulling me into an embrace, slathering wet, but well-meaning, kisses on my cheek.

"I'm well, Grand-mère. Please, don't worry yourself."

"Worry? Who? Me? What do I have to worry about? My girl is out running around the city at all hours of the night chasing after monsters. I should never have let Eliza Greystock talk me into letting you join up with her band of miscreants. And how is dear Eliza?"

I grinned. Agent Greystock was the first friend my grand-mère had made when she'd moved from France to England. Eliza Greystock had seen potential in me, and much to my grand-mère's purported dismay, had recruited me for the Society. Of course, I was eternally grateful to Agent

Greystock. Well, as thankful as anyone could be when they learned that England was actually full of vampires, werewolves, faerie people, and all other manner of oddities. But still. The job suited me. It was dangerous, but I liked the satisfaction of helping people, of keeping the city safe from monsters.

“She’s well, and she sends her greetings.”

“Come sit down. I already had a pot of tea on, but the kitchen—oh, oranges and lemons, the cupboards are ripped apart. Spring cleaning! What a mess. But no matter. Are you hungry?”

“No. Thank you.”

“Okay, I’ll get you some bread and cheese.”

I chuckled but said nothing. Grand-mère’s effusive attention was to be expected.

“And where is Quinn?” she asked, leading me into the small kitchen where we had a breakfast table. She was right. The kitchen was a disaster. Everything had been removed from the cupboards. The entire place smelled like soap.

“We’re working a case. He’s...elsewhere.”

“And why are you here?”

“I was at King’s College.”

Grand-mère crossed herself. “May God protect us. You said those creatures are there teaching children! How is it permitted? Oranges and lemons, God save us all.”

I grinned. Lionheart, a true Templar, was one of the most religious creatures in the realm—despite him knowing I smelled like red roses—but explaining that to Grand-mère would be incredibly complicated, so I said nothing.

Grand-mère dug through the stacks of dishes on the counter until she found a cup and saucer. She poured me tea then found a tiny corner of the breakfast table that was not heaped with the contents of the pantry, and set down the drink, moving the jar of honey closer to me. She dug into her goods once more and returned with some lemon.

“Drink, drink,” she said then went back to fix me a plate. “How is Quinn? Jessica?”

“They are both well,” I said, stirring in some honey. I sipped the tea, relishing the taste. Nothing ever tasted as good as food and drink from Grand-mère’s hand. I sighed contentedly.

“And Quinn’s brother, Robert?”

Hell’s bells. On with this again? Robert, Quinn’s younger brother, worked on an airship crew. He was a good-looking man, albeit dark-haired. He was very kind, but he lacked a certain something I needed in a potential beau. That, however, did not dissuade Grand-mère from suggesting him—repeatedly.

“Very busy. I believe his crew has been running merchant shipments to Calais and back.”

Grand-mère returned with a plate of bread, cheese, and fruit spread. She shifted pans aside, clearing a space for the food. “Oh, well, he must watch for airship pirates then. Such a brave man, just like his brother. And a good, sturdy man too. If Quinn’s brother is anything like him, you’re missing out. Clemenly, you must tell Quinn to arrange something for you and Robert. Quinn is such a good man. I’ve never seen Quinn bat an eye at another lady or curse or drink Scotch at ten o’clock in the morning,” she said then gave me a look.

“Grand-mère, I told you, I am on a case. Sometimes you do what you must to get a source to talk, thus the Scotch.” I realized then that if I told

Grand-mère that Quinn was currently at a brothel, I might shatter her entire worldview. Sipping my tea, I chuckled when I thought about it, but said nothing.

Clicking her tongue disapprovingly, Grand-mère shook her head and looked away. “If I had ever known how many bad things were in this country, I would have told your grandfather we needed to stay in France!”

I laughed. “You think London is bad? Paris is a hundred times worse.”

“Is that true?” Grand-mère asked, her eyes wide.

I nodded. “Yes. Very.” Paris was a sewer. Three agents who’d gone to work cases there last year had come home in caskets. We had our own challenges in England, but Her Majesty had a strong grip on the preternatural. Between the force that was our Queen and the ancient Society of the Rude Mechanicals, a mysterious body of people who lorded over the Red Cape Society, England kept a lid on its magical issues. Well, until recently. Something told me Her Majesty would not be happy to hear about the incident at Guildhall last night.

“Humph,” Grand-mère said then began stirring her cup of tea vigorously. “Well. No matter. Oh, I must tell you, Pastor Clark inquired after you yesterday. Such a sweet, charming man. You know, I think one day he will take a living in the countryside. Can you imagine a nice, peaceful life as a minister’s wife? Then you can set all this danger aside before you get yourself killed. Oh, Eliza. That silver-tongued devil. Why I ever agreed to let her take you away from me, I’ll never know. Yes, I’ll tell Pastor Clark you were here and that you asked about him. He will be so pleased!”

“Grand-mère!”

“Oh, Clemenly, oranges and lemons, I worry about you so.”

I chuckled softly and set my hand on hers. “I love you, Grand-mère.”

“I love you too, my girl. Please be careful out there.”

“Of course.”

“And come see me more often.”

“I will.”

“And find a husband.”

“Grand-mère!”

“Well, you were being so agreeable, I thought I would try.”

I laughed then leaned forward and kissed her on the cheek. “I’ll try...for you.” But up to that point, Lionheart was just about my best option. Something told me Grand-mère would not approve.

CHAPTER 6: ALES

I LEFT GRAND-MÈRE AND HEADED ACROSS TOWN to Ales and Ass to meet Quinn. The pub was located not far from headquarters at Marylebone and was frequented by agents.

As I approached the old building, I eyed the sign. On it was depicted a donkey wearing a top hat while drinking ale. But above that, discreetly carved, were the initials R. M., the letters encapsulated by a circle: the Rude Mechanicals. Her Majesty's secret investigative services covered a lot of ground, but our division, the Red Cape Society, were the only ones to keep the preternatural in check. But who kept us in check? Somewhere in the echelons above me were the Rude Mechanicals, a secret society whose name was whispered, identity secret, and activities even more elusive. Not for the first time, I wondered about my organization's mysterious benefactors.

"Clemeney," Allen, the tapster, called when I entered. He started pouring me a bitter. "Here for breakfast?"

I chuckled. It wasn't uncommon for me to stop by the pub on my way to an afternoon meeting—usually after I'd just woken up.

"I wish. Up still, in fact. Seen Quinn?"

"Not today."

I pulled out the small ladies' pocket watch I had tucked into a pocket on my bodice. It was already after three. I frowned.

I took the mug. "Thanks," I said, setting some coins on the bar.

Taking a seat at the corner of the bar, the angle that had the best view of the door and out the window, I pulled out the address Lionheart had given me. The address was in the factory row downriver. Such a location was out of the way of the general eye and gave the packs ample space for whatever

misdeeds they had underway. I pulled my dossier out of my satchel and set it on the bar. I flipped through the profiles of the guild members and others who'd been abducted. There wasn't much to go on. The marks were talented tinkers and alchemists. Professor Paxton, it seemed, was an expert in diseases. But they'd missed Professor Jamison who, according to my notes, was the leading scholar in search of an alkahest, a universal solvent capable of breaking all matter down into its constituent parts.

I sat back and tapped my finger on the papers as I sipped my drink. What were Cyril and the other wolves after? What were they doing?

I glanced up at the mural painted above the bar. There, a scene from Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* was on display. The character of Bottom wearing his ass's head, surrounded by the other tinkers depicted in the play, were laughing and drinking. The characters, referred to as the Rude Mechanicals in the comedy, the playwright, and the society were all somehow tied together. How, no one really seemed to know—or at least they weren't saying. Even Eliza Greystock had been tight-lipped from the beginning.

I was eighteen when Agent Greystock—Missus Eliza Greystock as I knew her back then—had stopped by the house for high tea with my grand-mère. While I'd tried to sit with them, smile, and be the polite young lady I should have been, I'd felt restless since Agent Greystock arrived that day. I'd pulled book after book from the shelf, always glancing out the window when I did so, perturbed by the man who was loitered on the street just outside.

I didn't know then what Agent Greystock's profession actually was. She'd told Grand-mère and me she worked for the government, nothing

more. But that day I uncovered a truth about her—and me.

Having tried at least a dozen novels, a reference text, the Bible, and a pamphlet on bird hunting, I was about to hunt the bookshelf for yet another book when I paused to look out the window once more.

The organ grinder and his pet monkey—which seemed too large to be a monkey and was wearing an odd little cape—had stopped outside our flat nearly an hour ago, right around the time Agent Greystock had arrived. I had thought it odd given that Grand-mère’s apartment was a bit off the Strand. As well, the organ grinder never actually bothered to play anything. He just stood there with his drum organ hanging around his neck, his oversized monkey sitting patiently on the curb. The whole thing was just... strange. And each and every time I looked at the pair, I had that odd tingling in my palms. I leaned against the wall and watched the two of them.

Behind me, Grand-mère and Agent Greystock—having finished gossiping about everyone they knew in common—started clearing the plates.

I frowned at the pair on the street below, my stomach growing increasingly knotted as a strange sense of alarm washed over me. I suddenly felt very sure Agent Greystock should not leave just then.

“Missus Greystock,” I said, hoping to distract her for a few moments until the ill-at-ease feeling passed. “Are organ grinders common throughout the city?”

Agent Greystock, who was carrying her cup and saucer, stopped and looked at me.

“I’m sorry, Clemeny. What do you mean?”

“There is a man outside. A man and a monkey, I think. He appears to be an organ grinder, but he hasn’t played anything and his monkey is decidedly still. It’s just... There is something odd about the pair.”

I stared out the window.

The monkey twitched and looked up at me. His eyes were a startling shade of yellow.

Behind me, I heard the china rattle in Agent Greystock's hand. She set the cup down and crossed the room to join me. She took my arm gently, then from inside a hidden pocket in the skirt of her dress, she pulled out a pistol.

"Missus Greystock," I whispered aghast.

"Sh," she said, quieting me as she peered out through the curtain. "When did they get here?"

"Just after you arrived. There is something very odd about their manner. Maybe it sounds mad, but I would swear there is something unnatural about them."

Agent Greystock narrowed her eyes at them then turned and looked at me. "And do you notice such things often?"

"I..." I began then paused. The truth was, I did. I knew when others had ill intent, I knew when I shouldn't walk down a certain street, I knew when men had dangerous thoughts, I noticed when something seemed wrong or out of place, I felt pain when I saw animals and children in jeopardy. I always felt too much, noticed too much. Most of the time, however, I figured I had an overly excited imagination. "I do have good instincts about some things."

She smiled at me and patted my arm. "That is no monkey. That small creature is a goblin. And that man is his golem. If you'll excuse me just a moment. Oh, and if you could keep Felice preoccupied, I'll be right back," she said then turned and went to the door.

Completely bewildered, I headed back to the kitchen where Grand-mère was setting the dishes to soak.

“Grand-mère, do we have any petit-fours left?” I asked, eyeing the bakery box.

“Did you finally get hungry, my girl?”

“Starving, really. And you had some small finger sandwiches. Any of those left?” I asked, knowing full well there were none.

Grand-mère laughed. “Oh, my Clemenly, I told you to eat. You were so busy avoiding the conversation you missed the meal. My dear Felice, I’ll be back in a moment,” she called to the living room.

Grand-mère, so distracted by my requests, didn’t seem to notice that Agent Greystock had not replied. It was a good thing that she was distracted too, because a few moments later, the ruckus coming from the street below was starting to get very loud.

“Grand-mère, do we have any fig jam? I’d love a taste of that with some cheddar.”

“Oh, yes. That combination is perfect,” my grand-mère said then immediately dipped into her cupboard where—as I already knew—the fig jam was stacked far in the back.

Moving discreetly, I stepped to the window. When I looked outside, I had to suppress a gasp. There, Missus Eliza Greystock was in a full-on brawl with the creature she’d described as a golem. She hung tightly with her free hand to the leash of the monkey—well, goblin. A woman near my grand-mère’s age, I was surprised to see her quickly subdue the hulking creature. Slamming the golem against the wall, she tied his hands behind his back. Yanking the creature that was supposed to be a monkey by his leash along with her, she headed toward the Strand. As she went, she looked up at the window. Seeing me there, she winked at me then pushed her captives forward. A moment later, I heard the call of a constable’s whistle.

Grand-mère clicked her tongue. “Hooligans. Always hooligans up to no good. Doesn’t your work concern such ruffians, Eliza?”

“I...I think she stepped away to wash her hands,” I said.

Grand-mère nodded then went back to work.

Humming a tune, I went to the washbasin and began cleaning the cups and saucers. It seemed like forever before I heard the slight, nearly inaudible click of the front door. A few moments later, Eliza Greystock appeared in the entryway to the kitchen.

“Dear Felice, I am so sorry, but I’ve forgotten that I have a meeting later today. Would you be a dear and forgive my hasty departure?”

“Oh, not at all. Oranges and lemons, Eliza. You work too much.”

“Work is good for a woman. Perhaps Clemenly would be interested in seeing what I do some time.”

Grand-mère gave Agent Greystock a look full of mixed emotions; confusion, worry, and joy were painted on her face all at once. She turned toward me. “Clemenly?”

“I... Yes. Thank you for the opportunity. I most certainly would love to hear more about your job,” I said.

Agent Greystock smiled. Reaching into her pocket, she handed me a card. On it was an address and the initials R. M. encapsulated in a circle embossed on the paper. “How about tomorrow morning at ten o’clock?”

“Sounds wonderful. Thank you.”

“Oh, Eliza! Thank you so much,” Grand-mère told her old friend, pulling Agent Greystock into a hug.

If Grand-mère knew then what she knew now, it’s quite possible she would have bashed Agent Greystock on the head with her frying pan—all the while cursing in French—then sent her on her way.

But she hadn’t.

So here I was.

Polishing off the first mug, I ordered a second bitter and read a bit more as I waited. When I rechecked the time, it was 4:15. No Quinn. Where was he? The bottoms of my feet tingled as I thought about it. Not a good sign.

I set some coins on the bar then rose to go.

“Leavin’, Clem?” Allen asked.

I nodded. “If Quinn shows up, tell him to meet me at the circus?” I said, using the codename for headquarters.

Allen nodded. “Of course.”

I headed back out onto the street. I looked both directions as I thought it over.

Quinn could be at home.

Or he could be following a lead.

Or he could be in trouble.

I didn’t like the nagging feeling in my gut and the way the bottom of my feet kept prickling. What was it the witches in Shakespeare’s play had said? “By the pricking of my thumb, something wicked this way comes.”

I turned and headed back across town toward Fleet Street, home of the Lolita pack’s well-noted and highly popular brothel.

Something told me wickedness was afoot.

CHAPTER 7: ASS

I GROANED AS I STARED UP AT THE FACE OF THE BROTHEL. It wasn't even dark out yet, and already the place was in full swing. Music, rowdy laughter, and the smells of tobacco smoke and heady perfume filled the air. And then there was that other scent, the musky, unmistakable odor of werewolves. I rolled my eyes. This was the last place I wanted to be.

The Lolita girls and I never got along well. I suspected they already knew that unlike Quinn, who seemed to be a bit soft toward them and their plight as second-class citizens in the wolf pecking order, I had no such illusions. Human women could be some of the nastiest bitches on the planet. Female werewolves? Literally bitches.

As I climbed up the steps, I noticed a vagrant sitting in the shadowed entryway of the building next door. The small man was dressed in rags, his face shadowed. I slowed as I looked him over. A moment later, he cast a glance at me. I caught the glint of yellow in his eyes before he turned and looked away.

I frowned. What was a goblin doing hanging around a werewolf brothel?

"Careful, Little Red," he said with a wheezing laugh.

Wonderful.

A footman, eyeing my red cape skeptically, opened the door but motioned to someone inside before letting me in. I bit the inside of my cheek then entered.

The place was overly warm, overly loud, and very...ripe. A young woman—well, werewolf, really—dressed in a flowy toga of some sort, both of her breasts peeking out, laughed loudly as two mostly-naked men chased her up the stairs. From somewhere above, I heard another tart articulating

her pleasure loudly, her bed creaking. The place was swarming with half-naked werewolves and men. Werewolf women were lusty lovers with a lot of stamina. The brothel turned a good business, as was evident by the number of bouncing cocks and jiggling tits I saw everywhere I turned. I tried to avert my eyes but found nowhere to look. Even the ceiling depicted an Olympian orgy scene.

Hell's bells.

"Agent Louvel," a voice purred. While the sound was all pleasantries, I hadn't missed a sharp undertone.

I turned to find Alodie, the madame of the house and pack leader, walking toward me. She had flowing yellow hair so pale that it was almost white. Her eyes were gold-colored. Her face was undeniably beautiful. And, given the sheer gown she was wearing, it was evident that her form was stunning as well. Stupidly, for a moment I felt a bit awkward. Under my leather bodice, pants, and steel vambraces, I was muscle and bone. My sinewy form kept me alive, which was all I really ever thought about. My curves were nothing compared to those of the whore. Was that part of the reason I couldn't find a gentleman? Was I too...hard?

Focus, Clemenly.

"Alodie. I apologize for coming. I'm looking for Quinn."

"Quinn?" she said then turned to the footman who shrugged.

"We haven't seen Quinn today."

"You haven't seen Quinn today? Are you sure?"

"Oh, yes," she said with a wolf-like smile. "I never miss my chance to try to convert that Red Cape."

I frowned at her. Alodie's affection for Quinn was partially why he was so successful in getting information out of her. Given his devotion to his wife, I never questioned his methods. But many times, I questioned

Alodie's. How far would she go to win Quinn? You couldn't trust a bitch. Ever. Which is why I found trusting her word right now particularly difficult. The she-wolf had no reason to be honest with me.

One of Alodie's customers wandered into the foyer, stopping when he saw me. "Well, well, well, have a look at this! Alodie, why didn't you tell me you had a new girl? And she's so *fit*," a lusty man wearing only a pair of knickers said as he stumbled toward me.

"Sir, you are mistaken," I began in protest.

The man hiccupped. "Are those handcuffs on your belt? That looks fun. Oh, Alodie. Let me have her," the man said. He stumbled forward, reached out, and gave my bottom a squeeze.

It took only a second for me to pull the silver dagger from my belt and hold it to the man's neck.

"Sir, if you want to keep your fingers, remove your hand," I said.

The others around me stilled and quieted. I cast a glance around. There was a glint in the eyes of the brothel girls, a menacing red fire provoked by the sudden appearance of the silver blade.

"What? Oh. All right," the man said then stepped back. "My mistake."

"My apologies, Percy. She's not one of my girls," Alodie said then waved to another harlot. "Jewell, take Percy upstairs and give him a taste of what he's after. Agent Louvel was just leaving."

Taking me gently by the arm, Alodie walked me back to the door.

"If I ever see you in my establishment again, Agent Louvel, I will have my girls rip your throat out," she said, her voice sounding sweet.

"You can try. But I'll probably shoot you all first," I said, keeping my voice equally pleasant. "Again, my apologies. I was only looking for Quinn," I said then stepped outside.

“As I said, he was not here today. Goodbye, Agent Louvel,” she said then turned and went back inside, slamming the door behind her.

Dammit, Quinn. Where did you go?

“She lies,” a voice hissed.

I turned back to the entryway where the goblin was still sitting. I cast an eye up at the face of the brothel building. No one was looking. I turned and headed down the street toward the next building where the beast sat. Even from this distance, I could smell the scent of spirits wafting off him.

“Indeed?” I asked, leaning against the wall.

The goblin chuckled. “Indeed,” he said in a mocking tone.

“I don’t suppose you’d tell me what you saw?”

“Not for nothin’.”

“Of course not. What do you want?”

“A kiss.”

I sighed. Goblin men. Always on about kissing and fornication. No wonder he was poised outside the brothel. He was probably enjoying the view through the windows.

“I think not.”

“Too bad,” he hissed then laughed. “Prudey agent won’t give a single kiss to save her partner’s life.”

“My partner’s life? What are you talking about?”

“Oh, now you’re interested, aren’t you? Pucker up.”

“Can we discuss an alternative?”

“All right. Show me your tits.”

I pulled out my pistol and trained it on the little rat. “Try again.”

“What? I’m just trying to be helpful. You’re the one who’s being difficult.”

I pulled out my coin pouch and tossed it to him. “That will have to do. Go buy yourself a kiss.”

The goblin sighed. “Fine. Fine. I saw your red-caped partner. Big man. Grey hair. They took him out about five minutes after he got here, threw him into an auto and drove off.”

“Who took him out?”

“Cyril’s dogs.”

“Which way did they go?”

The goblin pointed. “Downriver. Strange things happening. It’s not just your people they’ve been picking up. Two of my kind are missing too. And rumor has it, they picked up a sanguinarian.”

“The wolves picked up a vampire?”

“You didn’t hear it from me,” the creature said then shifted back into the shadows and out of sight. I heard an odd screeching sound. “You didn’t hear it from any of my kind,” he said, this time his voice sounded further away.

I stepped forward and looked into the dark entryway. There was a small grate just under the front window that was slightly ajar. The goblin was gone.

I stared downriver.

Quinn.

CHAPTER 8: MAGNUM OPUS

IT WAS ALREADY AFTER DARK WHEN I ARRIVED at the manufacturing district. Spotting a ladder up on the side of the building that housed *The Daedalus Company*, I scampered to the top of the tall building then began working my way toward the address Lionheart had given me. Given it was already dark, I stopped a moment in a shadowed spot and pulled out the optic Master Hart had made. It took a little adjusting to get it to sit right, but when I turned it on, I was surprised to see how well it made out shapes in the dark.

With my sight enhanced, I headed quickly and quietly across the rooftops toward the building. Thus far, I spotted no guards on the roof. Staying hidden, I leaped onto the roof of the building then went to the levered windows which looked down into the factory below.

Directly below me was a balcony on which I spotted three guards. They were looking out the windows toward the street, all of their guns drawn. All of them were from Paddington pack.

Moving carefully, I shifted so I could see below more clearly when suddenly someone grabbed my arm.

I pulled my dagger and, turning in a flash, spun on the unknown assailant.

“Agent Rose?” I whispered as I gazed down the barrel of another Red Cape Society agent’s weapon. Casting a glance behind her, I saw Agent Reid.

Agent Rose put her finger to her lips to silence me then gave me a hand, helping me to my feet. Motioning for me to follow her, I joined her and Agent Reid behind a chimney stack where I found, much to my surprise, two werewolves knocked out cold, bound and gagged.

“What are you doing here?” I whispered.

“Tracking Constantine,” Agent Rose replied in a whisper.

“Constantine?” Constantine needed no last name. The vampire was well known to the Society. He was dangerous in every way imaginable and had only managed to keep from getting slain due to an edict from the crown. Apparently, he’d provided some assistance during the Napoleonic Wars. Since then, he’d been keeping to himself, holing up in some castle somewhere in Scotland. What in the hell were the wolves doing with him?

“Cyril’s pack picked him up. Any idea why?” Agent Reid asked me.

I shook my head. “No. But I do know they picked up some goblins as well. And I believe they have Agent Briarwood,” I said, referring to Quinn. I tried to keep my voice steady but failed. The telltale crack at the end betrayed my anxiety. Where was Quinn? What in the hell was going on?

The agents looked at one another, both of them looking distressed. Quinn was one of the senior agents. If I remembered right, he’d trained Agent Rose when she’d been recruited.

“When did they nab Quinn?” Agent Rose asked.

“Goblin saw the wolves lift him this afternoon from Alodie’s brothel.”

Agent Reid frowned. “There’s at least two dozen wolves down there.”

“Any sign of your fang?”

Agent Rose shook her head.

“Let’s see what they’re up to,” I said then motioned toward the windows.

We approached slowly, looking inside. Below, I saw wolves—still in human form—from Whitehall, Paddington, Lupercal, and even Romulus packs. That left out only Templars, Lolitas, and Conklins. It was notable that Conklins were not there. That nasty group of buggers was always brawling.

But even more interesting was the flurry of activity at a series of workbenches below. I pushed up my night optic and pulled out my spyglass for a better look. A series of stations had been erected, and at them, I spotted my missing guild members. It did not escape my notice that each was chained by the ankle to the floor.

My eyes drifted over each person there, noting the face of Lionheart's squash partner—Professor Paxton.

“Bring him here,” Fenton said, his gravelly voice pouring from one of the side rooms.

Agent Rose barely suppressed a gasp when they wheeled out the vampire Constantine, who had been staked crucifixion-style to a modified dolly.

“What the hell?” Agent Reid swore.

A sick feeling rocked my stomach. Whatever was happening here, it was not good. I scanned the space for Quinn.

“Well, professor. Could you do it or not?” Fenton asked with a growl.

“I...I hardly know. The notes here are vague, and the *prima materia* from this *gentleman* is unlike anything I have ever seen,” Professor Paxton said, looking back through her scope at a sample. “What is this man infected with?” she asked, looking toward Constantine.

Fenton laughed. “You don't need to worry about that. You just do what the boss asked, beautiful,” he said then reached out and stroked her hair.

Something deep within me hardened.

“What your *boss* asked is impossible,” said another guild member. I recognized him from his photo as the missing alchemist Neville McKee.

Frustrated, Fenton growled then turned and punched the man in the stomach. “Shut your mouth, and get the work done.”

“I have had some success here,” Toby Winston, an alchemist, said. “The sample provided by your boss is reacting. Basing my experiment on Jamison’s notes, I was able to use the alkahest she has been working with to some effect.”

“Someone tell Doctor Marlowe that Master Winston has made a discovery,” Fenton said.

There was a clamor of noise from the back and a moment later, a bent old man in a heavy robe, walking with a cane, entered. Two Romulous pack members were at his side. The man stopped by Professor Paxton’s table. He looked at her work, nodded, then turned to Master Winston, motioning for the alchemist to move aside so he could investigate.

Doctor Marlowe tapped his cane. “We are making progress. Good. Let’s get some more samples. Bring in the others.”

There was a commotion, and a moment later, three werewolves came in, dragging along two goblin men. The goblins fought the wolves, cursing them in a language I didn’t understand.

My heart stopped when I saw the wolves push Quinn forward. His hands were bound behind his back.

The old man whom they called Doctor Marlowe chuckled when he saw Quinn. “Ah, now we have the complete set. *Nigredo*,” he said, pointing to Constantine. “*Citrinitas*,” he added, pointing to the goblins. “*Rubedo*,” he said, pointing to Quinn. “And...” he said then looked back toward Byrony Paxton. “*Albedo*, I believe. How does she smell to you?” the old man asked, turning to Fenton.

“Yeah, she’s pure.”

The old man nodded. “My nose isn’t what it once was, but so I thought.”

“What...what are you talking about?” Professor Paxton stammered.

“Let’s get a sample from all of them. We’ll use Master Winston’s work and see what we can uncover. And when should we expect Professor Jamison? Her work is key.”

“Conklin went to round her up,” Fenton replied.

“From where?” Doctor Marlowe asked.

“Red Capes had her stashed on the Isle of Dogs. We found her. They’ll have her soon.”

“Let’s hope you have more success than you did last time.”

Fenton laughed. “Well, he’s *here* tonight,” he said, pointing at Quinn. “So much for the fierce werewolf hunter.”

Doctor Marlowe shook his head, apparently unimpressed with Fenton’s bravado, then went back to Master Winston’s workbench once more.

“Sample? How much?” one of the wolves asked, grabbing one of the goblins by the arm.

Doctor Marlowe signed heavily. “Use the device Master Dart made, you idiot.”

“Oh. Right,” the wolf said then went to Master Dart’s table and picked up a syringe, which had a long tube connected to it that led to a glass container.

The werewolf grabbed the thing clumsily.

“You fool. You’ll break it. Master Dart, you take the samples,” Doctor Marlowe said then turned to the werewolf. “Unchain Master Dart.”

“Yes, sir.” The werewolf set the device down and unchained the tinker.

Oliver Dart, a slim man who looked like he might faint at any moment, picked up the syringe and approached the goblin.

Doctor Marlowe looked over his shoulder at Master Dart. “A blood sample from each of those wretched beasts,” he said, pointing toward the goblins. “And from the Red Cape as well,” he added motioning to Quinn.

Doctor Marlowe then turned and gave Constantine a hard look. The two exchanged a glance. Doctor Marlowe grinned. "Let's get what we can from our illustrious guest. Then we'll burn him. He'll draw too much heat from the Red Capes. Ah, yes, and a sample from Professor Paxton too, but be gentle. We need her alive and *albedo*," he said, giving Fenton a sharp look.

Gasping, I rose and pulled my pistols.

"Who in the hell is that old werewolf?" Agent Reid asked.

I shook my head as I quickly dug into my satchel. I handed slim boxes of bullets to Agents Rose and Reid who stared at me. "Silver bullets. Right between the eyes. I'll grab Quinn."

"I need to get to Constantine," Agent Rose said. The look of distress on her face puzzled me.

Agent Reid pulled a small, hand-held bomb from his pack. "Shall we start with a distraction?"

CHAPTER 9: BOOM GOES THE DYNAMITE

THE LOUD EXPLOSION SHOOK THE BUILDING. Windowpanes burst sending showers of glass onto the floor. The guards on the platform rushed downstairs while the others went to the doors.

Stupid wolves.

There was a second explosion as Agent Reid tossed another bomb toward the door where guards were standing. The device exploded, causing the whole building to rock.

I rushed down the platform, Agent Rose right behind me. Pulling out my pistol, I took aim and fired.

“Red Capes,” someone yelled.

There was another explosion as Agent Reid tossed a third bomb.

Growling, the wolves began to shift form.

“Get Doctor Marlowe and the tinkers out of here,” Fenton called then turned. The massive beast craned his fat neck then stretched as he shifted into werewolf form.

Blasting, I shot through the crowd as I tried to get to Quinn.

One after the other, the wolves lunged at me, but in the confusion of the gunfire and smoke, they were unsteady. In their haste to unchain the guild members, I was able to get off a few shots before the werewolves even saw me coming.

I eyed the door to see Doctor Marlowe being ushered out of the building by two of Fenton’s regular henchmen.

The man glared at me, his eyes flaming ruby red.

I lifted my pistol and aimed at him.

I got off a shot, but the old man waved his hand in front of him, and the bullet went wide, hitting the wolf guard beside him in the shoulder instead.

The three of them turned quickly and headed out the door.

There was another explosion.

Fenton howled.

The sound sent a shiver down my spine. I looked back in time to see the beta lunge toward Agent Reid.

“Reid,” I screamed.

He looked up in time to see Fenton charging him.

Agent Rose turned and fired in an effort to protect her partner.

I raced over to Quinn, who lay forgotten on the floor.

“Quinn,” I said, bending to help him up.

“Clemenly,” he said, his voice sounding ragged. “Get the guildsmen out of here.”

“Let’s get you up and out of here first,” I told him as I quickly cut his binds.

“No, Clem. Leave me. You...you don’t understand,” he said.

Agent Rose screamed.

I looked back to see Agent Reid on the ground, Fenton chewing out his throat.

Agent Rose shot wildly, but at least half a dozen wolves were between her and Agent Reid.

“Quinn,” I said, attempting to help him up. “Come on. We need to go.”

“He’s gone, Agent. They cut him open. Leave him,” the vampire Constantine told me, his voice surprisingly calm and steady.

“What are you talking about?” I asked the vampire.

“Get me down. Get me down, and I’ll kill them all.” With a turn of the neck, his mouth shifted, a row of jagged teeth gleaming menacingly. “Get me down, and he might still have a chance.”

“Quinn?” I said, shaking Quinn’s shoulder. He didn’t respond. His face had turned horribly pale.

“Let me down, Agent,” the vampire said.

I shook Quinn again. “Quinn?”

Agent Rose’s piercing scream grabbed my attention. I looked back to see her pull herself up onto the platform. She had a long cut on her leg. Red blood marred her trousers. She pulled a sword, swinging it in front of her as she retreated. But she was quickly running out of space.

“Let me down,” the vampire screamed at me. This time, his words shook me to my core.

Leaping to my feet, I went to the vampire. “Your word you’ll leave the rest of us in peace. The other agents, the guild members, and me. Your word, fang.”

“Don’t you know who I am?” he said through jagged teeth. “You have my word.”

Dammit. There was no way I should trust him.

“You have my word. Now let me down,” he yelled at me, his face full of fury.

I looked back at Agent Rose as she climbed back up the steps, skillfully brandishing her weapon in front of her as six wolves cornered her. Skilled or not, she was going to die.

The wolves had nearly unbound all the scientists, including Professor Paxton. I needed to do something. Fast.

“Hell’s bells,” I swore then one by one, I pulled the stakes from the hands and feet of the vampire.

The vampire’s eyes glinted brightly, shimmering with silver light.

“Thank you,” he said, and with speed I could not even phantom, the vampire shot around the room.

Howls of pain and anguish filled the air. The wolves called to one another, tried to warn one another, but it was too late.

In a blur of blood and body parts, the vampire exacted his terrible vengeance.

Grabbing whomever they could—including Oliver Dart, Mavis Porter, and Toby Winston—the surviving wolves rushed to the waiting autos outside. The goblins had already disappeared.

The last of the wolves tugged Professor Paxton along behind him. Lionheart's friend fought back with all her might.

Leaving Quinn, I pulled my dagger from my belt and rushed across the room. Slicing with as much strength as I could muster, I slashed the wolf's arm.

He let go of the Professor.

Growling, he looked from me then back into the room where Constantine devastated the remaining wolves.

"Leave her. Come on," one of the other pack members yelled.

The wolf glared at me then turned and fled.

I turned and rushed back to Quinn.

"Quinn," I called, shaking his shoulder. "Quinn?" I turned and looked at Professor Paxton who had followed me. "What happened to him?"

"They removed part of his liver. We need to get him to a proper surgeon."

"His liver? How do you..." I began but watched as Professor Paxton motioned toward one of the workbenches. In a glass tray, I spotted a piece of purplish meat.

My stomach turned. "Oh my God."

"He can survive, but he needs a skilled surgeon. Doctor....Doctor Murray. Yes. He has a place in Mayfair. He could help. But we must get

there quickly.”

Quickly was a problem. The wolves and their autos were gone, and there was no underground transit here.

I stood and looked around the room.

There were bits of werewolf everywhere, and in the center of the space, a very bloody vampire stood, his hands shaking, blood dripping from his fingers.

Limping, Agent Rose approached him.

She whispered something to him. Her words were soft and gentle.

He shook his head.

I eyed Agent Reid who lay on the floor. His neck was a bloody mess. His bright blue eyes were glassy, frozen in a gaze fixed on the ceiling. He was gone.

“Constantine,” I called. “Agent Briarwood is gravely injured. He must get to Doctor Murray in Mayfair, or he will die. I...I need your help.”

The vampire looked at Agent Rose then back over his shoulder at me.

He whispered something to the agent that I could not quite hear.

She nodded.

He turned then suddenly appeared at my side.

The vampire met my eyes. “This will make us even.”

“Agreed.”

He picked up Quinn then in a blur of black, he disappeared back into the night.

“What was he?” Professor Paxton whispered.

“You don’t want to know,” I said then crossed the room to Agent Rose who stood over the remains of her partner.

Tears streamed down her cheeks.

“I will hunt that man down and kill him,” she said, her voice shaking with rage.

“Doctor Marlowe. He was a werewolf...and a mage.”

“A mage?”

I nodded.

Agent Rose stared. “No spell will save him. I will find him and finish him.”

“Not alone,” I said then set my hand on her shoulder.

CHAPTER 10: 0-0-RED

WITH THE HELP OF THE LOCAL CONSTABLES, we were able to get word to the Society of the tragedy that had unfolded. Not long after, a Society airship, boasting its signature scarlet-colored balloon, arrived to help secure the crime scene, gather evidence, and take Agent Reid's body back to headquarters.

"I'll go with him," Agent Rose said as they prepared his body for transport.

As the first team worked the crime scene, a small, second aircraft arrived. A crewman rushed down the rope ladder and over to me.

"Agent Louvel?" he asked. I eyed him over, noting the R. M. pendant on his lapel. He was one of us, an agent of the Rude Mechanicals.

"Yes?"

"I am instructed to transport you and Professor Paxton. Please come with me."

"Come with you where?"

"Classified. I'm sure you understand. Come along."

I nodded to Professor Paxton, who looked like she was thrilled to go anywhere as long as it was away from here. Following the agent, we climbed up the rope ladder to the small airship. As soon as we were aboard, the ship turned and headed back toward the city.

I pulled out my silver flask and handed it to Professor Paxton.

She sighed heavily, twisted off the cap, and then took a swig as she stared out at the city. "All my life I was taught to stay away from anyone wearing a red cape. To avoid you if I saw you on the street. To look away. But you... You're a force of good, aren't you?"

“Yes. We work under the auspices of Her Majesty on cases such as the one in which you find yourself the unfortunate victim.”

She took another swig. “Those *creatures*... There are more of them, aren’t there?”

“Yes.”

“And they walk amongst us? Look like ordinary people?”

I smiled softly, wondering how she would feel if she knew that it was her squash partner—a werewolf—who’d asked me to find her. “Yes. But they aren’t all bad.”

“No?” she asked with a huff as if she didn’t believe me.

“Well. I mean, most of them *are* bad, but not *all* of them.”

She laughed lightly.

To my surprise, the airship turned away from headquarters and began to fly in the direction of Buckingham. Only when an agent had made a horrible mistake did the Queen summon them. This shift in course did not bode well. As the ship neared the palace, I braced myself. Clearly, I was in for a lecture.

The airship docked on the platform on the roof of the palace. A fleet of attendants arrived from the palace to steady the ladder.

“Agent. Your attendance is requested,” the agent of the Rude Mechanicals told me and the professor.

“Guess I’m out of a job,” I said lightly.

“Hope it’s not as bad as that,” he said then extended a hand to help the professor down. I followed along behind her.

I dropped onto the roof of the palace and looked around. The small crowd assembled was mostly comprised of palace servants. But amongst them were also two armed guards and a Society agent.

“This way, Agent Louvel, professor,” the Rude Mechanicals agent said then led us into the palace.

We walked down the narrow servants’ halls to a flight of stairs. We wound down one flight of stairs after another, after another, and after another. I soon realized that we were, in fact, underground. The air was crisp and had the distinctive perfume of earth.

At the end of the stairs, the footman opened a door.

I was surprised to find Agent Greystock waiting in the hallway on the other side.

“Clemenly. At last. Are you all right?” she asked.

I nodded. “Yes. I’m fine. This is Professor Paxton.”

“Good evening, professor. My name is Agent Greystock. Are you well? Do you require any medical treatment?”

“No, madame. I’m just... I’m just in a state of shock, I believe.”

“That is to be expected. Please, come along,” she said then motioned for us to follow her.

“Is there any word on Quinn? I sent a message back to headquarters. He was taken to a Doctor Murray in Mayfair,” I asked.

Agent Greystock nodded. “I’ve had couriers there and back. He arrived in time to receive emergency medical attention. Doctor Murray, though retired, did what he could. Quinn is alive. In pain, but alive. Clemenly, how did you know about Doctor Murray?”

“I didn’t. Professor Paxton did.”

“I’ve studied some of his treatments, his essays on disease, his work with the late Master Hawking. He is well known in the medical community as the brightest surgeon in the realm.”

“Agent Briarwood is lucky for your quick thinking and his quick delivery to the doctor’s address,” Agent Greystock said then raised an

eyebrow at me.

“I believe Agent Rose will be following up on that...complication.”

“Indeed. I was saddened to learn about Agent Reid. He was a good man and a good agent.”

“Fenton’s handiwork.”

Agent Greystock frowned.

“Has anyone sent word to Jessica?” I asked. “She will be worried about Quinn.”

Agent Greystock nodded. “I’ve sent someone to fetch her. The Murrays have been very obliging,” she said then opened a door. “If you please,” she said then motioned for us to enter.

Professor Paxton and I entered the room to find Agent Harper, Agent White, and Agent Fox. And Her Majesty.

Professor Paxton let out a small gasp.

Both of us stopped and dropped into a curtsy.

“Yes, yes. Dispense with formalities, please. Agent Louvel and Professor Paxton, correct?”

“Yes, Your Majesty,” Professor Paxton and I said in unison.

Victoria smirked then looked back down at the papers she was holding in her hand. “Agent Louvel, Agent Greystock has apprised me of the events leading up to the ruckus at Guildhall the other night. I’ve also heard the report on the events that took place tonight. All a bit murky, I’m afraid. Can you please tell me what’s happening in my realm?”

“Your Majesty, I can only tell you what I have observed. There is a werewolf amongst the packs I have never seen before. He is old—even for a wolf. The others call him Doctor Marlowe. He appears to have some skill with mage work in addition to the lupine affliction. He is the one behind this mess.”

“Him. Not Cyril?”

“Is Cyril—pardon my interruption, Your Majesty—a huge man with red hair?” Professor Paxton asked.

“Indeed he is,” Victoria replied.

“He was there at the factory. He was working with Doctor Marlowe, but the doctor was the one organizing our research. Cyril, I believe, was the person who captured the gentleman you called Constantine.”

“So this Doctor Marlowe is using the packs for muscle. Any sign of Constantine after all this mess?” Victoria asked Agent Greystock.

“Not since he delivered Agent Briarwood.”

“Make sure Agent Rose follows up. The wolves lifted Constantine from his castle in Scotland. We must make sure all our other assets in that division are secure.”

“Yes, Your Majesty,” Agent Greystock said.

“I know Agent Rose will be keen to join Agent Louvel and murder every wolf in the city—not that I blame her—but let’s make sure she stays focused on looking after her own charges.”

“Of course, Your Majesty,” Agent Greystock said with a nod.

I chewed the inside of my cheek as I watched Her Majesty flip through the papers. I was shocked to see that she knew all our names, our assignments. I had always assumed that working as part of Her Majesty’s Secret Intelligence Service was really just a title. In this case, it seemed the Queen did know who we were and what work we were doing.

“Professor Paxton, perhaps you can enlighten us on what, exactly, Doctor Marlowe had you working on.”

“Alchemy, Your Majesty. He had us studying the interactions between various metals and flesh and blood.”

The Queen's forehead furrowed. "Whatever for? A philosopher's stone?"

The professor shook her head. "He's not after gold or even the transmutation of metals. He had us studying silver," she said then frowned. "I didn't understand why at the time. But I think... I think he was looking for a way to use an alchemical formula to fortify the blood—*their blood*—against silver. But it was no use. I was able to make some headway in determining the weakness in their humours, those peculiarities that make them particularly susceptible to silver, but without Doctor Jamison's work on the alkahest, we were able to do little."

"That's unfortunate then," Her Majesty said.

"Unfortunate? Why?" I asked.

"Because Professor Jamison was abducted from the safehouse on the Isle of Dogs earlier this evening," Her Majesty said.

"Werewolves' longevity is only cut short by two things, a natural death many hundreds of years in the making and silver. If the wolves can find a way to become immune to the effects of silver..." I said.

The Queen nodded. "Then we have a very big bad wolf problem," she said then turned to the professor once more. "Can it be done?"

"Perhaps. Like an inoculation. Our research in the course of disease is insufficient, Your Majesty. Based on Doctor Jenner's research in smallpox, we have applied the theory of inoculation to many forms of disease control. But it's still quite far beyond our understanding. And yet..."

Her Majesty raised an eyebrow at the professor.

"And yet, Doctor Jamison's study from an alchemical point of view, using the theories of the Magnum Opus and the four pillars of alchemy is something I have not explored, but it does offer possibilities."

“Your Majesty,” Agent Harper said, rising. The stack of books before her was so tall that I had nearly forgotten she was even there.

“Yes?”

“This Doctor Marlowe. Clem—Agent Louvel said she had not seen him before. We have record of a practicing mage, Kit Marlowe, who banished by the Rude Mechanicals in 1593. Our records indicate he went into exile in Italy and hasn’t been seen in England since.”

“Kit Marlowe... Christopher Marlowe, the playwright?” Agent Greystock asked.

“The same,” Agent Harper answered.

“Marlowe,” the Queen said with a sigh. “Seems his characters weren’t the only ones looking for a Faustian bargain. Well, Agent Louvel, the werewolves are seeking to enhance their immortality by dodging your silver bullets. And this time, they have a mage pulling the strings. Whatever shall we do?”

“Whatever Your Majesty commands,” I said.

Queen Victoria smirked. “I like this girl,” she said then turned and pulled out two sheets of paper. Snatching a quill, she jotted notes on both then melted wax and embossed each letter with her seal. She turned back to us once more.

“Agent White will take Professor Paxton to our secure location in Nottingham for the time being,” she said then looked at the agent, who nodded. She handed one of the notes to me. “And that, Agent Louvel, is your license to use lethal force. The Britannia Accord is hereby suspended. Find that mage and kill him. I’ve had enough of Cyril and Fenton as well. Agent Greystock will send agents to keep a lid on the Lolitas and arrest every other werewolf we can find. And you, Agent Louvel, will deliver this letter on my behalf.”

I took the second sealed letter from her hand. “To whom, Your Majesty?”

“Lionheart. Go tell Sir Richard he needs to set aside his research for the moment. After all, God has waited this long for him to finish his quest. He can wait another fortnight,” Her Majesty said. “Tell him I call my Templars. They *will* help you. That is an order from his Queen,” she said then tapped the letter in my hand, giving me a knowing look.

I nodded. “Yes, Your Majesty.”

“Sir Richard? Do you mean Richard Spencer is...” Professor Paxton began, looking from Her Majesty to me.

“Please, professor. Come with me,” Agent White said, motioning for the professor to follow her.

“I... Okay,” she said then turned and followed Agent White from the room.

“If you don’t mind me saying so, Your Majesty, Sir Richard has no interest in becoming alpha, nor does he have the temperament,” I said.

“Indeed, he does not, but we shall leave it to him to find a peaceful solution to that problem.”

Clever Queen. “Yes, Your Majesty.”

I curtsied to her once more then turned to Agent Greystock.

“With your permission, I’ll accompany Agent Louvel out,” Agent Greystock said to the Queen, who nodded then turned back to the papers on her desk. Agent Greystock motioned for me to follow her outside.

“If you see Quinn, please tell him...I said to rest and not to worry,” I told Agent Greystock.

“You know your partner well. I understand he was inquiring after you,” Agent Greystock said.

“What’s there to worry about? I’m off to go work with a werewolf to take down a different werewolf. What could possibly go wrong?”

Agent Greystock looked at me, the answer evident in both of our eyes.
Everything.

CHAPTER 11: THE KNIGHTS TEMPLAR

ONCE AGAIN, I TOOK THE TRAM BACK ACROSS TOWN to Fleet Street. This time, however, I made a turn off the main thoroughfare through a small arch along the street, barely noticeable under the façade of a Tudor townhouse next to a bookshop. Given it was dawn, the shopkeep had just opened the curtains on the window of the little bookshop when I slipped through the arch.

I emerged on the other side in Temple Square, the home—hidden in plain sight—of the Knights Templar.

Of course, everyone knew the Knights Templar were long gone. The gardens, church, hall, and buildings of Temple Square were just remnants of a past history, of knights of both good and bad repute, the knights of the crusades. Such men, for better or worse, were long gone. Right?

But the thing was, of course, that was about as far from the truth as one could possibly get. Some of the Templars had returned from the crusades, but not as they once were. Something had happened during their quest, and the Templars had changed, become afflicted with the lupine infection. The Templars still lived, but they were no longer just men.

Taking a deep breath, I crossed into Temple Square. I eyed the grounds warily. Her Majesty might be right that the Templars would be inclined to follow any edict she set down, but such an edict delivered via a Red Cape might not be welcomed. As I passed through the square, I spotted one man headed toward Templar Hall, no doubt for his morning meal. He stopped mid-step and eyed me warily.

Wolf.

Another man who had just started work in the flowerbeds also gave me a sidelong glance.

Another wolf.

I felt eyes on me from above, looking down on me from the windows.

The palms of my hands itched. I had literally walked into the wolves' den.

Well, I'd made the first move. We'd see what would happen next.

Just off the square was the Templar church, a small building distinctive for its rotunda. While the church was nothing to boast about in comparison to the grandeur of Saint Paul's, it must have been considered an awe-inspiring structure in the twelfth century when it was built. I opened the wooden door of the church and entered. The place was completely still. Slants of light shone in from the windows high above. It did not escape my notice that the church appeared to have had some newly refurbished architectural pieces. I passed the massive pillars and went under the dome in the round part of the cathedral. Here, the tombs of Templar Knights lay on the floor. I paused to look down at the regal figures immortalized in stone. The Templars had gone off to fight at the behest of their monarch. They were from a different time and under a different set of circumstances. But were they really any different from myself? They were the crown's warriors. And so was I.

A door at the back of the chapel opened.

I inhaled deeply and waited as the sound of footsteps approached me.

"You do know it's very uncomfortable for me to come in here," Lionheart said.

I looked up at him.

He was visibly clenching his jaw.

"Yes. I do know that. That's why I'm here. I figured it would be the safest place in the square."

“If you wanted to be safe, Agent Louvel, then coming into pack territory was probably not a wise idea.”

I pulled the paper the Queen had given me and handed it to Lionheart. He looked from the paper to me then frowned and opened the missive. I watched his face as he read it over, his features darkening.

When he was done, he looked up at me.

“Her Majesty formally requests the assistance of the Templar pack. She has asked that you set aside your research and aid me in ending Cyril’s reign, tracking down and murdering Fenton, and destroying a wolf mage by the name of Kit Marlowe who, apparently, is attempting to use alchemy to develop a tolerance to silver. Her Majesty has revoked the Britannia Accord and threatens to expel all werewolves from London. Unless, of course, you can assist me in getting this situation under control.”

Lionheart grunted in a very wolf-like manner, a sound I had never heard from him before. The veneer of the college thrown off, I was starting to see that Sir Richard Spencer was far more wolf than he let on. He shook the paper in his hand as he considered my words, and those of Her Majesty.

“Byrony Paxton is safe. She has been taken to a secure location. *Your brothers* had her chained up, forced her to carve up goblins, my partner, and a fang named Constantine. Ever heard of him?”

“You must be joking.”

“And, I believe, that mage also had some designs on her person. I was able to recover her from *your brothers*, but not without losing Agent Reid. And Agent Briarwood has been seriously wounded. Did *your brothers* tell you the scope of the activities they were planning under their new mage?”

“They are *not* my brothers,” Lionheart said, temper flaring. “*These* are my brothers,” he said, motioning to the men entombed before us.

My ruse had worked. “The Templars did the bidding of King Richard. You were agents of the crown. I do the bidding of Queen Victoria as an agent of the crown. I know you to be royalists, but do you still consider yourselves Her Majesty’s agents?”

“Of course we do,” he said hotly.

“Very well. I guess that makes *us* brothers then. So, no more research for now. Now, we work together.”

“She has called her knights. We cannot say no. So, Agent Louvel, how do you suggest we begin?”

“We need to find Cyril, Fenton, and Marlowe. The Red Capes will be arresting everyone else they can get their hands on today, and Lolitas will be locked down.”

“In that case, you need to give me a couple of hours. I need to meet with my pack.”

“Very well.”

“You mentioned the vampire Constantine. I have had some dealings with him in the past. I cannot believe Cyril would be foolish enough to move against him.”

“Foolish or not, that’s exactly what he did. Many Lupercal pack members paid the price for that mistake. But, I believe, the vampire has retreated.”

Lionheart shook his head. “I doubt that very much.”

“We shall see. Very well, Sir Richard. You talk to your pack, and I’ll meet you at one o’clock at The Mushroom.”

“The Mushroom? Why there, of all places?”

“Because if you want to buy information, you need to know the best place to shop.”

Lionheart raised an eyebrow at me.

I looked once more at the tombs of the fallen Templars. “I *am* sorry for your many losses,” I said then inclined my head toward the knights.

Lionheart was still for a moment. “And I am sorry to hear about Agents Reid and Briarwood,” he said then looked at me. “You are an unusual woman, Agent Louvel.”

“Hmmm,” I said then smiled. “I thought I just smelled odd.”

“I never said you smelled odd. In fact, I said you smell like—”

“Roses. Yes, I know.”

“Indeed. Who is your family, Agent?”

I smirked at him then turned and headed to the chapel door. “One o’clock, Lionheart. You’re buying,” I said then pushed open the door and left.

It unnerved me more than I wanted to show that Lionheart sensed something about me I didn’t know, didn’t understand.

Who is your family?

That was a very good question.

CHAPTER 12: MISSUS COLERIDGE'S GLOBE HOUSE FOR UNMARRIED GIRLS

WITH JUST A FEW HOURS REMAINING before I needed to meet Lionheart, I waved down a passing auto, much to my annoyance—but need outweighed disdain—and caught a ride across the Thames to South Bank. Wolves had notoriously good noses. Most agents lived outside the city or across the Thames. Passing the river, even by way of a boat or bridge, threw off our scents. Werewolves had been known to trail us from time to time. Thus far, they had not discovered—at least as far as I knew—my tiny flat at Missus Coleridge's Globe Home for Unmarried Girls, so named because the building was located not far from where Master Shakespeare's famous theatre once stood.

Checking to make sure I had not been followed, I entered the small, three-story house and headed upstairs. I moved quickly and quietly. Missus Coleridge had, no doubt, heard some delicious gossip and would want to share—for hours. I, on the other hand, wanted to sleep.

Pulling out my key slowly and quietly, I opened the door and stepped inside my tiny flat. As I entered, the board below my foot squeaked.

The door to Missus Coleridge's first floor flat opened.

"Clemeney, is that you?"

I cringed. Feeling terribly guilty, I pulled the door shut behind me, pulling the handle into the lock, wincing at the barely audible click. Missus Coleridge was a truly kind woman. I'd have to make a point of stopping by her flat and letting her gossip to me to make up for the nagging guilt I felt. That, and I needed to canvass the roof to see if I could get inside via the window rather than the front door.

Closing and locking the door behind me, I turned and leaned against the doorframe.

My small flat had none of the charm and feel of family that exuded from every inch of Grand-mère's home. But visiting Grand-mère opened her up to discovery, a risk I hoped to minimize at every turn. An unmarried woman, I *should* live with my relative. I *should* have a respectable flat in the city. I wanted to live with my Grand-mère. But it wasn't safe. My flat was small, dank, dark, and all around miserable. But it was better this way.

For now.

I scanned the room. You could see the entire place in one glance. Not even bothering to remove my cape, I crossed the room and lay down on my slim bed.

Who is your family?

Lionheart's question had rattled around in my head ever since I'd left.

The truth was, I had no idea.

I was just a baby when Grand-mère discovered me on the steps of St Clement Danes. Unlike most fairy tale scenarios, I didn't come with a letter, had no secret birthmarks, nor was there some mysterious amulet strapped around my neck. I wasn't the heir to some mysterious lost kingdom. I was an unwanted baby left on the doorstep of a church. That deep feeling of being unwanted, if I was really honest with myself, had never left me. Being part of the Red Cape Society was actually the first time I had ever felt like I had a place where I belonged, where I was with others who needed me, wanted me. In a way, it filled the sore part of myself. Unwanted. Maybe there was a reason I couldn't find the love of my life. There was something about me on a deep level that was just...unloveable.

I sighed then rolled over.

At least Grand-mère had not seen me like that. And even when it was time for me to leave home, to start my career, she hadn't stopped me. She had loved me, wanted me, but still let me go. In fact, much to my surprise, she'd been extremely supportive.

"Clemeney? Are you dressed, my girl?" Grand-mère had called from the kitchen the morning I was set to report to work at the Red Cape Society.

Eliza Greystock's chance notice of my sixth sense had actually worked out for the best. Having passed rigorous testing and physical training, I was given a beat in Agent Greystock's division, assigned to shadow a man named Quinn Briarwood, whom Agent Greystock had called the best. The morning I was set to report to work, I expected Grand-mère to be in a fit of nerves. What I found instead, however, surprised me.

"Yes, Grand-mère," I said, opening the door to my broom closet-sized bedroom in our flat.

Grand-mère looked over my clothes, sucking in her air through her teeth as she considered.

A flush of self-consciousness wash over me. Trousers had never been Grand-mère's taste—she always preferred me in dresses—but they were far more practical. And honestly, I felt comfortable in the snug garments. If my training was any indication, I'd be doing a lot of running on the job. Gowns weren't going to work.

"I know it's not the most feminine—"

"Oh no. You look perfect, my girl. It's just that you're missing something," she said then handed me a box wrapped in lavender colored tissue paper.

“What’s this?”

Grand-mère grinned. “A gift, of course. Oh, oranges and lemons, I don’t know what to think. But I want you to be safe. Open it.”

I tore off the paper of the long, slender box then lifted the lid. I was surprised to see a dagger lying inside.

“Grand-mère...”

“I had my sterling silver flatware melted down. I took it and your grandfather’s bayonet to the smith. He told me the dagger is mostly silver, but reinforced it so it would be more durable. Eliza said... Well, she told me just a little about the job you’ll be doing. If there is anything I know about what you’re up against, it’s that silver is the best weapon.”

“Grand-mère, thank you. Grand-père’s sword... don’t know what to say,” I replied, feeling my eyes well with tears. I had never known Grand-mère’s husband. He had died long before I came into her life, but she spoke of him like a hero. The bayonet he’d used during the Napoleonic Wars had always hung on the wall of our parlor. I hadn’t even noticed it was missing.

“Say nothing, my girl. Only be safe,” she said, taking out the weapon and hooking it to my belt. “Now, off you go. Be sure to eat something, Clemenly. And keep an eye out. You never know, you might see some handsome man. Eliza said there are many unattached gentleman working at the agency.”

“Grand-mère.”

“What? You never know.”

Sighing, I pulled her into a hug.

“Be careful,” she whispered in my ear.

I kissed her on the cheek. “Of course,” I replied then grabbing my bag, I’d set out on my first day as an agent of the Red Cape Society. Little did I

know, Grand-mère's dagger would step in to save my hide on more than one occasion.

I pulled the dagger off my belt and lay it on the bed beside me. The smith had shaped the hilt of the dagger like the branches of a tree. Usually there was an animal, flower, or symbol on the pommel. But a tree? I shook my head. Next time I saw Grand-mère, I'd have to remember to ask her why she—or the smith—had chosen this design. But even as I thought it, my eyes began to slowly close.

Two hours. I just needed two hours of sleep. Two hours after being awake for the last thirty wasn't too much to ask, was it?

Before my brain could even bubble up with a reply, I fell asleep.

CHAPTER 13: WHAT CATERPILLAR KNEW

WHILE I WAS USUALLY LESS THAN GRATEFUL for the whistle at the factory beside Missus Coleridge's Globe House for Unmarried Girls, the infernal device blasting every hour, today it kept me in check. I was awake—miserably—and back on the job before the fog had cleared from my mind. It wasn't until I was standing outside The Mushroom that my wits began to sharpen.

At precisely one o'clock, Lionheart arrived. Much to my surprise, he was driving a two-wheeled cycle. The strange device clicked and let off a hiss of steam when he turned it off. He parked the machine alongside the other autos outside the tavern then pulled off the leather skullcap and goggles he'd been wearing.

His yellow hair, tousled in the effort, gave him a boyish charm entirely at odds with who he really was. Or did it? Who was he, really? Before the lupine affliction, who had Richard Spencer actually been? A knight loyal to his king. Thinking of him in that regard made me see him in an entirely new light. He might have been a wolf, but he was also a warrior and deserving of my respect. He smoothed down his locks and straightened his jacket then eyed me over.

"Are you going to wear that inside?" he asked.

Or maybe not. I glanced down at my leather pants, corset, and top. My clothing was not much different from that of an airship jockey.

"The cape," he said, clarifying. "The rest looks very good," he added with a smirk.

I rolled my eyes. "There are some places where it pays to be what you are. This is one of those places. For me, at least."

Lionheart raised a brow. "Really, Little Red?"

“Yes. Really. Let’s go,” I said then turned and headed inside.

The place was dark and smelled of alcohol, opium, and danger. There were small tables spread all around the room, the place dimly lit by colorful glass lamps, which sent blobs of jewel-colored light around the room. I motioned to Lionheart, and we took a seat in the corner.

At the bar, I saw the henchman they called the Knave. He whispered something into the ear of a little albino boy who nodded then rushed off to the back of the room. There, silk curtains were closed around a meeting space. When the boy entered, I saw at least three other people inside, including, I assumed, the boss.

“Drinks?” a pretty tart asked, leaning in such a manner that we had a clear view of her jiggly breasts.

Lionheart sneered then averted his eyes.

The tart hadn’t missed the expression. She leaned back then turned to me, a steely expression on her face.

“MacCutcheon. Two glasses.”

The girl nodded then went back to the bar. She stood close to the Knave, who lifted his drink. He spoke in a low tone to the girl. She eyed us over her shoulder then answered him. So far so good. I scanned the room. I saw gunrunners, opium dealers, airship pirates, and thieves. And they spied me. They eyed my red cape warily.

“They’re talking about us in the back,” Lionheart said, easing back into his seat.

“Good. Keep listening. How did your meeting with your pack go?”

“I can hardly concentrate on them and talk to you at the same time. Let it suffice to say that we will do as Her Majesty asks.”

“Good.”

“We’ll see.”

“Here you are,” the tart said, returning once more. She set down glasses in front of Lionheart and me. “Compliments of the house, Agent.”

“Thank you. If Caterpillar is available, a word?”

The girl nodded but said nothing else.

She returned to the bar where she spoke to the Knave, who polished off his drink then turned and went to the back. He gave Lionheart and me a passing glance. Devilishly handsome scoundrel. Why were all the rogues so desperately attractive?

I sighed. I really needed to find myself a man.

I lifted my drink. “God save the Queen.”

“God save the Queen,” Lionheart replied, clicking his glass against mine. He took a long drink.

I could sense Lionheart’s discomfort. I had, on many occasions, felt the same air coming off Quinn. It was as if Lionheart was reluctant to be bothered with this problem. Quinn had never meant any disrespect to me or the job, but of late, I had sensed a weariness in him. But Lionheart was more than seven hundred years old. He had a right to be weary. Yet, still, I could tell he’d rather be anywhere else, doing anything else, than sitting here.

“Professor Paxton,” Lionheart said as he set down his drink. “I don’t suppose you’d tell me where she is. Since we are, as you said, brothers in arms.”

“I’m afraid not. North. More than that, I can’t say.”

“And she is safe where she is?” he asked, his voice cracking very slightly at the end.

Did the werewolf have some genuine affection for the professor? I turned and looked at him, my eyes narrowing. There was something there, but I wasn’t sure what. Whatever it was, he’d hidden it quickly.

Lionheart lifted his drink and sipped once more.

“I swear that she is safe. Once the matter is in hand, I am sure she’ll be able to return to London.”

He nodded. “And how is Agent Briarwood?”

“Recovering.”

“At our meeting today... My pack didn’t know about Doctor Marlowe. We didn’t know the nature of their research. In fact, there was some debate amongst the knights as to whether or not we should stop the work. Immunity to silver would help us continue our quest.”

I raised an eyebrow at him. “But you’re here.”

“In the end, we decided that God gave us this particular vulnerability for a reason. We shall not seek to meddle in his work.” Lionheart flicked his eyes toward the back. “He’s coming.”

The Knave crossed the room. “All right. Come along,” he said, motioning for us to follow.

Lionheart and I rose and followed the Knave to the back. Passing through the curtains, we found Caterpillar, one of London’s biggest crime bosses, waiting. He was sitting with his feet up reading over some papers. Behind him stood two guards. He picked up a glass of absinthe, took a sip, then eyed Lionheart and me.

“Rather a bad day to show up here, Agent,” he said then tapped the papers he was holding. “Thanks to the Red Capes, seems I’m out quite a lot of money and some business partners to boot.”

I smiled at him. He might be a wily criminal, but it was unlikely he had any idea his business partners were werewolves. We’d probably done him a favor, in the long run.

“My apologies.”

Caterpillar smirked in the most charming of fashions. “Agent Louvel, I’m told,” he said, casting a glance to the Knave.

“Indeed.”

“But you are unknown,” he said, looking at Lionheart. He lifted his drink and sipped once more.

“My associate,” I said.

Caterpillar shook his head and set his drink aside. “I don’t deal with unknowns, Agent. And, as I said, the Society has disrupted things around here today. Perhaps it’s best if we part ways before we even begin.”

“But I’m here to buy, and you’re here to sell. I’m looking for someone who has gone to ground. You sell. I’ll buy. Don’t worry about my associate. He’s a silent partner.”

Caterpillar eyed Lionheart. “Who are you looking for?” he asked, turning to me.

“Cyril.”

Caterpillar’s eyes narrowed. Cyril ran one of the biggest crime syndicates in London and often butted heads with other operators, including Caterpillar. From what I could tell, the two of them kept an uneasy peace. Yet if I were Caterpillar, I’d most certainly want Cyril out of the way.

Caterpillar looked over his shoulder and waved for the little albino child to come to him. He whispered in the boy’s ear.

I cast a glance up at Lionheart.

His eyes flicked toward me, but he said nothing.

The pair exchanged a few more whispered words then Caterpillar turned to me once more. “I apologize, Agent. We heard that there was some trouble downriver last night, but we don’t know where Cyril has gone. I wish I could be more help.”

“And that’s your final answer?”

“I’m afraid so.”

I frowned. “Very well. Thank you for your time.”

“And for the drink,” Lionheart said, inclining his head to Caterpillar.

The crime boss nodded to Lionheart then motioned for one of his henchmen to show us out.

Lionheart and I headed outside and walked over to his cycle.

“Did you know he wouldn’t talk?” Lionheart asked.

“Maybe.”

Lionheart chuckled. “But you guessed he would know where Cyril had gone.”

“Of course.”

“And you assumed with my good hearing, I would be able to pick up the information?”

“Well, did you get the location?” I asked.

He nodded. “A hangar in the yard near the airship towers,” he said then pulled on his cap, goggles, and gloves. “Well, are you going to climb on?” he said, motioning to the back.

I stared at the infernal machine then groaned.

Lionheart chuckled and handed me a pair of goggles. I pulled the goggles on, then, much against my will, I climbed on the back.

“Hold on to me,” he said.

I wrapped my arms around the werewolf. He was muscularly built. The feel of his body, the closeness of our embrace, felt entirely too familiar and stirred up a longing in me that made me blush.

Lionheart laughed. “Careful, Little Red, or you might agree to that dinner yet,” he said then turned on the engine. The machine let out a hiss of steam.

“I’m not sure Professor Paxton would appreciate me accepting that invitation.”

Lionheart looked back over his shoulder at me. “Are you always so observant, Little Red?”

“I try.”

Lionheart grunted then turned the cycle onto the city street.

CHAPTER 14: THE ENEMY OF MY ENEMY

THE AIRSHIP TOWERS ALONG THE THAMES were home to a busy international port. The towers loomed over the London skyline. The fabulous balloons and gondolas floated in and out of port headed to Ireland, Scotland, and back across the Channel to the European port of Calais and beyond. From here, other ships rigged for longer travel would make the treacherous trip from London to Ireland then to the Azores in a cross-sea voyage to the Americas.

Seeking to blend in with the other travelers, Lionheart parked his cycle outside Rose's Hopper, the popular pub located near the towers. I pulled off my red cape and stashed it in my satchel. Wordlessly, Lionheart motioned to me, and we headed through the crowd, around the back of the towers to the hangars and garages in the shipyard where tinkers and mechanics built new ships, made repairs, or showcased the latest in airship designs. The place was busy enough that no one paid any attention to us.

As we walked, we noticed a crowd had gathered around to see a master tinker unveil a new airship about to come up for auction.

Taking me gently by the arm, Lionheart guided me into the crowd.

"The others will mask my scent," he whispered. "There," he said motioning with his chin to the next hangar down.

I followed his gaze. Sitting outside the hangar were two autos that I recognized from the warehouse night before.

"Ladies and gentleman, you have never seen an airship quite like this one before. Faster than the *Stargazer*, lighter weight than any ship of Spanish design, and equipped with the latest engineering designed in Bavaria, meet the newest creation in our fleet," the man at the front of the crowd said.

The crowd *ooohed* and *ahhed* as the doors to the hangar opened to reveal an impressive airship. The crowd moved forward, taking Lionheart and me along with it.

As we entered the hangar, Lionheart steered me to the left. He deftly lifted two mechanics' overcoats from the wall. Pulling one on, he handed the other to me. We slipped on the coats then moved out a side door. Blending in with the busy crowd, we made our way toward the second hangar.

"Guards in the windows," I said. "Two guards on the door."

Lionheart inhaled then exhaled deeply. "Fenton. But no Cyril. And no mage. But I—" He paused. He turned and looked all around him. "This way," he said, motioning for me to follow him to the airship repair tower not far away. Here, airships were anchored aloft as they were being re-outfitted with new gear pieces, getting repairs on broken propellers, or making other changes.

Keeping our heads down, Lionheart and I headed up the steps of the tower.

I could tell from his movements that Lionheart was tracking someone.

We walked up the stairs to the second level then down a row that led to an empty berth.

"Cyril, the mage, and two others recently came this way," he said then looked toward the skyline.

"Are the others still inside the hangar? The tinkers? Fenton?"

Lionheart nodded.

I looked around. No one seemed to be on the airship docked nearby. Moving quickly, I slipped onto the ship and went to the prow. Settling in, I pulled out my spyglass. Lionheart moved in behind me.

I scanned the hangar. From this vantage point, I could just see through the windows. Inside, I spotted a few new workbenches.

“Professor Jamison,” I said. “And Master Winston. Looks like... Whitechapel and Paddington.”

“A runner came to Temple Square just after you left. Noah has been arrested, and most of his pack along with him.”

Noah was the beta of Conklin pack. I was very, very glad to hear he’d been taken off the streets. “Good.”

Lionheart said nothing.

I looked back at him.

“And just what does Her Majesty plan to do with the packs once she’s taken them into custody? She can hardly keep them chained forever.”

Something told me Her Majesty could and would keep them chained forever, if the mood struck her to do so. “I don’t know.”

Lionheart cleared his throat.

“What is it?”

“Templar will face ramifications for helping the crown.”

“Ramifications, meaning revenge?”

“Yes.”

“Then I guess you’d better just become alpha.”

“There is nothing I could want less, Little Red.”

“I’m sure another solution will come to you.”

“Let’s hope.”

I sat back. “I’ll send word to the Red Capes. We’ll round them up now and get the alchemists out of there.”

Lionheart shook his head. “If Her Majesty wants this threat eliminated, then it must be eliminated. Her knights will return tonight. We’ll wait until Cyril and the mage return and take the situation in hand.”

“Good. Where should I meet you?”

“I was referring to the Templars and only the Templars.”

“Last night I found my partner half dead because of Cyril, Fenton, and that mage. Not to mention what happened to Agent Reid. I’m coming, whether you want me there or not.”

“I won’t be able to protect you.”

“I don’t need you to protect me.”

Lionheart frowned at me. “I need to go and ready my brothers. Do you want a ride back to your headquarters?”

“No, thank you.”

“It’s really not an inconven—”

“I’ve had enough of that infernal machine,” I said with a smirk.

Lionheart nodded. “Very well,” he said then rose. “Tonight... Be careful, Agent Louvel.”

“You too, Sir Richard.”

He grinned, bowed in the most courtly of manners, then turned and debarked the airship.

I leaned back once more and gazed through my spyglass. Rather than spying the building, I turned and watched Lionheart as he made his way through the crowd.

So, he and Byrony Paxton had...something.

I sighed.

That something was a whole lot more than the nothing I had. I loved my job, but it would be nice to have someone. I rose and closed my spyglass. Maybe I didn’t have someone I loved like that, but I did care about the people in my life. I pulled out my pocket watch.

I had enough time.

CHAPTER 15: MEANWHILE, IN TWICKENHAM

AFTER LIONHEART HAD GONE, I headed back into the city. My first stop was at one of the oldest millineries in London, The Palatine Crown. The hat shop, which boasted an excellent array of gentlemen's top hats and petite ladies' top hats, sat along a quiet street. When I entered, I found the milliner sizing an aged gentleman for a new hat.

The hatter cast a glance up at me. I tapped the tiny badge on my waist.

The man nodded then turned back to his customer.

Going to the back room, I went to the side wall where a stack of crates rose to the ceiling. The wooden crates, marked as silk, leather, manikins, or cloth, took up most of the wall. I slid my fingers along the edge of the tallest crate marked *red velvet*. There, I found a tiny lever. I switched it to the side. A door built into the crate swung open. I slipped inside, closing the crate door behind me, then headed to the hidden door along the rear wall. On the other side, I found a flight of stairs that led downward.

I followed the stairs down under the city to a tunnel. Two metal trams sat waiting. I slipped inside. This time I set my controls to take me to the outskirts of London. Strapping in once more, I activated the lever, waited for the clicks, then held on with all my might.

* * *

The tunnel let out southwest of London in a nondescript building under Twickenham station. I exited the building, mindful to cover my tracks, and headed toward the small village square. I passed through the quaint town to a small cottage on the outskirts. The little Tudor-style home with its charming garden exuded all the sweetness one might expect of a sedate

country family. I doubted any of Quinn's neighbors realized he was one of the most skilled killers in all the realm.

As always, I scanned around me for signs of, well, anything. But there was no one nearby.

I went to the door and knocked.

Quinn's footman cast a suspicious gaze out the window.

I waved to him.

A moment later, the door opened.

"Agent Louvel," he said, motioning for me to enter.

"I'm here to see Quinn."

He motioned for me to follow as he headed upstairs. I had been inside Quinn's house on a number of occasions, but never in the family areas of the home. The house, as I understood it, had once belonged to a relative of Jessica's and had been passed down to her. Quinn had grown up in the city, a wild creature like myself. But he'd always seemed content, at peace, at home with his wife.

The footman motioned for me to wait as he went into one of the rooms.

Inside, I could hear Jessica and Quinn.

A moment later, the footman reappeared, Jessica along with him. Jessica's curly black hair was a tangled mess. The dark rings under her eyes told me she hadn't slept.

"Clemenly," she said, pulling me into an embrace. "Thank God."

"How is he?"

"Recovering. The Society brought him home by airship this morning. Doctor Murray, such a kindly gentleman, accompanied him. The doctor said Quinn had been injured but would recover. Quinn isn't saying much about what happened. The doctor gave him laudanum. He's in pain. Thank God, he's mostly been sleeping. What happened?"

I exhaled deeply. Quinn never liked Jessica to worry. If she really knew everything we saw, everything we did...well, Quinn kept that from her. It was not my place to change that. "Bad men, doing bad things."

She frowned but nodded. "Why don't you go inside? I'm sure you have a lot to talk about. Let me go downstairs and have Mary make you something to eat."

"Thank you," I said, squeezing her arm.

I entered the bedroom. Quinn lay on a large bed, half dozing as he looked out the window. There were several amber-colored bottles at his bedside.

"Quinn," I said softly then went and sat down in the chair by his bed.

"Sorry, partner. I messed up," he said then frowned.

"Messed up? Hardly."

"Well, I'm here, and you're there. And now you've got no one backing you up."

"On the contrary, Her Majesty has seen fit to force me into a new, albeit temporary, alliance."

"With whom?"

"Lionheart."

Quinn tried to laugh, but I could see it pained him. "Clemeny, I'm sorry. Cyril's pack jumped me. I woke up on a table with someone cutting me open. I don't even remember what happened after that."

"Well, it seems the wolves are in league with a mage who's been living in exile. I believe Queen Elizabeth banished him, if that gives you an indication of how long he's been plotting revenge. Apparently, he's been trying to develop an immunity to silver."

"A mage?"

"A werewolf mage. Doubling down on annoying, aren't they?"

Quinn smiled, but his grin was not as bright as usual. “How did I end up at the doctor’s flat? I don’t remember anything.”

“Constantine.”

Quinn stared at me then narrowed his gaze. “I think... I do remember him being there. I remember the wolves cutting him. Constantine,” he said, his voice full of disbelief. “The wolves must have lost their minds. But why did he help me?”

“I think it was a combination of my setting him free, his desire for revenge, and something *odd* between him and Agent Rose.”

“Agent Rose? That’s surprising.”

“Isn’t it? But you don’t need to worry about that. By the time me and my *temporary* partner are done, we’ll have most of the wolves rounded up and jailed. If Lionheart becomes alpha, maybe things will quiet down by the time you return. Hell, maybe it will become so quiet we can switch to magical artifacts. Or should we join the Pellinores?”

“The Pellinores? Track down dragons?” Quinn said with an amused grin.

“Why not?” I replied with a smirk.

“Bloody waste of time, that’s why not. Lionheart will never want to become alpha.”

“Makes him the best man for the job then, doesn’t it?”

“Maybe.”

“Well, you can ask him yourself when you’re feeling better.”

“No. No, Clem. I don’t think so.”

“What? I don’t think Lionheart minds you too much. He’s really not that bad. Actually, I think he—”

“No,” Quinn said then shook his head. “Not that. I...talked to Jessica. I’m tired, Clem. This was the end of the line for me.”

My breath caught in my throat. “What?”

“I’m going to turn in my cape.”

“But Quinn...”

Quinn sighed. “The doctor said it will take time to recover—months. I don’t want to waste my life worrying about wolves. When I am well enough, Jessica and I want to have a family of our own. There’s still time for us, but not if I keep working like this. I’m tired of being cold, in danger, always hunting some monster.”

“But that’s the life.”

“Yes, it is. And I’m done with it.”

A million emotions tried to bubble to the surface. I wanted to tell him no. I wanted to tell him he couldn’t leave me like that. But I had no right. He was my partner, and he’d been a damned good one. And the truth was, I understood. I reached out and took his hand. “I’ll miss you.”

“No. You’ll come to dinner every night. And one day, when you’re settled down, our children will play together. We’ll impress them with true stories of things they won’t believe and think we made up. Werewolves, vampires, and goblins living in London? Who could ever believe such nonsense? They’ll think we’re senile, but we’ll know better.”

I smiled. “That’s a nice vision.” Nice, but far from the future I saw for myself.

Quinn squeezed my hand. “I know you,” he said. “You want to go down in a blaze of gun smoke. One day, you’ll change your mind.”

“Maybe you’re right.”

“Have I ever been wrong before?”

“Remember the time you were going to shake down that vagrant, but he turned out to be a ghoul? You nearly lost your hand.”

“Yeah, okay, but just that once.”

“What about when you forced me to drink that Chinese absinthe so we wouldn’t offend our informant? You said we would be fine. We both retched for three days straight.”

Quinn laughed but then winced. “Yeah. Sorry about that one. Okay, okay. Maybe I have been wrong once or twice.”

I smiled at him. “Have you told Greystock?”

“Not yet.”

I nodded.

“At least now I’ll be able to grow out my beard in peace.”

“Retiring is no excuse for growing out a beard,” Jessica said as she entered the room carrying a tray. She set it on a table near the window. “Eat,” she told me. “I know you’re going to give me some excuse about needing to leave or being busy, but eat first. Grandmother Louvel would never forgive me if I didn’t feed you.”

I smiled at her then rose and went to the table. My mouth watered to see the freshly baked scones, clotted cream, and jam. I tore into the food at once.

“Just like Quinn. Your stomach is upside down. You don’t know if it’s night or day.”

“At least my stomach isn’t literally upside down,” I said through a mouthful of scone. I winked at Quinn.

“Very funny,” he said then shook his head.

“Agent humor,” Jessica said with a roll of her eyes. She turned her attention back to her husband. Sitting on the bed beside him, she slipped his hand into hers. Quinn gave her a long, loving look. She leaned in and set a kiss on his forehead. The power of their love was tangible.

My cheeks full of scone, I sighed enviously.

I really needed to find a man.

“Hey, Quinn, how is your brother, Robert?”

CHAPTER 16: CAPED CRUSADERS

I LEFT QUINN'S HOUSE JUST AS DUSK APPROACHED. Apparently, I'd nodded off at some point because I'd awoken at the table with scone crumbles on my shirt listening to Quinn snore as Jessica sat quietly in the corner sewing. In a hurry, I made my way back to the tram and to the city.

The worst thing about my beat was the fact that I hardly ever got any sleep.

Well, that and the werewolves.

And the fact that my partner, who I relied upon to keep me alive, had decided to call it quits.

That meant I'd either get landed with someone I didn't particularly like or have to train someone new. Neither option sounded appealing. Quinn was like an overbearing older brother. I was going to miss him terribly, but I could hardly blame him. Not everyone could do what we did. You'd have to be half mad to want to.

Barking mad, in fact.

I laughed at my own joke. Yeah, it was going to be hard to find a partner who was a good match for me.

As soon as I returned to the heart of the city, I headed to the airship towers and took the lift up. The towers were divided into multiple platforms; the third platform at the top of the towers housed the big airships that traveled abroad. On the platforms below were the smaller transports and the occasional pleasure cruiser. A floating brothel, such vessels had been widely popular twenty years before. Since Victoria came to reign, however, they'd come under tighter restrictions and were far less common. Nothing, however, stopped the scoundrel airship pirates from docking in London. They always had some excuse, permit, or reason to be there—none

of them lawful. That happened to work out very well for me this particular evening.

I headed down the platform on the second level on the airship tower. Spotting a vessel that looked like it was about ready to debark, I went to the side of the ship and whistled to the captain.

I cast a quick glance at the name of the vessel: *Elven Rue*. Odd name.

“*Oui, mademoiselle?*” one of the crew members said.

Having been raised by a French grandmother, I was suddenly very glad that I was fluent in both French and English.

“Mind making a small detour? I need a lift,” I said in French.

The man frowned then relayed my question to the captain.

“*Non,*” the captain said. “We’re in a hurry. I won’t be stopping at any other ports. I want to get across the Channel before dawn.”

“I don’t need a port. I need a quick drop-off. Just a pause in your departure. That’s all,” I said then produced a bag of coin. I needed to remember to put in for some reimbursements. Between buying off goblins and airship pirates, it was beginning to be an expensive week.

The man sighed. “Dropped off where?”

“The shipyard,” I said, motioning over my shoulder.

The man furrowed his brow. “Just walk.”

I smirked. “Not quite what I had in mind,” I said.

The captain eyed me suspiciously then waved for me to come aboard, his hand outstretched.

“A rope down to a roof. I’ll be off your ship before you know it,” I said, handing him my bag of coin.

“A roof?”

“Yes.”

He shook his head then went back to the wheelstand. I lingered behind him. The airship lifted up and out of port.

“There,” I said, pointing to the hangar where I’d seen the pack earlier that day.

The airship turned as if it was merely preparing to round the towers and set out on its course.

The captain locked the wheelstand and motioned for me to follow him to the side of the ship. He yanked on a rope, ensuring it was safely secured to the deck, then handed the line to me.

“Your getaway, *mademoiselle*,” he said with a grin.

I nodded and went to the side of the ship.

From this angle, I could see inside the hangar but would remain unseen. I tossed the rope over and looked down, ensuring that it fell close to an area with solid footing. The captain had marked the location well, putting me just at the corner and out of sight from anyone who happened to gaze up.

I climbed up on the rail of the ship and grabbed the rope. I nodded to the captain and holding on tight, slipped down the rope to the building below, landing as softly as possible on the roof.

Quinn would have loved this.

Well, the old Quinn would have loved this. Now my partner was cut up and lying in bed looking ashen. And Agent Reid, who’d been a good colleague and fearsome vampire slayer, was dead. Who in the hell was this werewolf, Marlowe?

Overhead, the propeller on the airship *Elven Rue* clicked on, and the ship turned south. The rope disappeared back onto the deck. As the ship turned, I eyed the captain who removed his cap, lifted it in farewell, then guided his airship back into the night.

Moving quickly, I worked my way toward one of the windows that looked below. Lying on my stomach, I pulled out my spyglass and looked inside.

Cyril and Fenton were standing just inside the hangar door having an argument. Cyril, who was at least two hands taller than Fenton, shoved his beta. Fenton lowered his head in submission and stepped back.

Bloody wolves.

I eyed Cyril closely. Ginger nightmare. He was much larger than Fenton or Lionheart. His raw force and tendency to use violence for any solution were what had kept him in power for many years.

But it had also cost him.

Rumor had it that Cyril's last mate had run off with their son, fled to the Americas after Cyril had shown signs that he would be no easier on his own blood than he was on anyone else. It had been twenty years now. Despite his power, no she-wolf ever went willingly to him, including Alodie. More than once, Quinn and I had turned Cyril's pack away from human brothels for fear of what might happen to the human girls when the wolves were done with them. It was sick business. I admired Lionheart's ability to curb his urges, even if he did pick up on the scent of roses every now and then.

I heard the sound of an auto pull up in front of the hangar. A moment later, another wolf opened a side door. It was Damien, a wolf from Conklin pack. He rushed across the room to Fenton. Once again, a sharp conversation erupted.

I looked away from the pair and scanned the place for Marlowe. I found him in a corner with Professor Jamison. The professor's long, silver hair trailed down her back. She looked disheveled and exhausted. Marlowe slid his finger across some lines on a scroll then directed the professor's attention to the text.

I sat back.

The wolves already had long lives. If they became immune to silver, there would be no stopping them.

We had to end this work before it was too late.

I kept up my surveillance, waiting for Templar pack to arrive.

The materials Professor Jamison and Master Winston had been working with were being boxed up while Marlowe nagged Cyril to the point of irritation. I watched as the lesser pack members headed back and forth across the yard toward the airship towers, pushing pallets of crates with them. Using my spyglass, I watched the wolves take the boxes to a ship and load them aboard. The wolves were planning to leave.

I had already started to strategize how I might take on the entire pack—and probably die in the process, a prospect that was not too appealing—when the palms of my hands got that strange tingly feeling. Aside from the werewolves below, the yard was fairly deserted. Only the occasional drunken airship crewman passed by. Regardless, something was coming. Standing, I looked back across the skyline toward Tinker's Tower. It was nearly midnight. The moonlight shimmered down on the rooftops, giving everything a sheen of blue.

In the far-off distance, I heard a howl.

And then another.

I cast a glance inside. The wolves below stilled, then Fenton started rounding up the humans.

"Put out the lamps," Cyril called. "Get the alchemists on the airship."

"Red Capes?" Damien asked.

Cyril craned his neck to breath in the air. "No," he said with a low and mean growl.

I looked back across the yard. Shadows shifted, yet I could see nothing, not even the telltale red eyes of werewolves.

Working quickly, I dug into my bag and grabbed the night optic array. Pulling it on, I looked below. I closed my right eye, looking through the optic with my left. Cyril's wolves moved to guard the doors. I saw them shift and change into werewolf form. But in the back, Marlowe, Fenton, and the humans were preparing to make an escape.

From the darkness somewhere around the yard, I heard a low, dark howl.

The sound chilled me to the bone. While the sound was not human, I knew it was Lionheart.

A series of howls answered in reply.

"Christ, boss. What's happening?" I heard Damien ask.

"Templars," Cyril said. I could hear the sneer in his voice.

The murmuring voices of the wolves below became silent.

"We should retreat," Damien said.

The sound of the smack was audible. "Say that again, and I'll kill you myself."

"Cyril," someone called.

The boss moved toward the front of the hangar.

"Christ," Damien said again.

I moved to the front of the building to see what had caught the wolves' attention then gasped when I saw. I pushed up my night optic for just a moment.

There, in the yard before the hangar, stood the Knights Templar. Not a pack of werewolves or a gang of men. Something in between. Two dozen armed soldiers wearing the white capes with the red cross of the Templars stood ready for battle, their leader at the front. All of them armed, not just

with long claws, fangs, and muscle, but with helmets, swords, and shields. Their gold-colored armor had been smelted to fit their physique in shifted form. The moonlight glinted off their armor. They were a magnificent sight to behold.

“Screw them. Open fire,” Cyril called.

The front door slid open so Cyril’s werewolves could attack.

Lionheart, who’d been standing at the front of his men, motioned to the knights and in a blur of swirling white and red capes, the Knights Templar swarmed the hangar.

I slipped on my night array lens once more then turned and ran back to the open window. I grabbed a chain attached to a lever and slipped inside.

Fenton and Marlow rushed the alchemists out the back door.

I cast a glance back at Lionheart and the Templars. I didn’t want to leave the werewolf. Everything depended on him defeating Cyril. Everything. But if I didn’t go after Marlowe now, and the werewolf got away, I’d end up chasing him all across the realm.

Looking back one more time, I spied Lionheart amongst the fray.

He paused, nodded to me, and then turned once more, his blade glimmering in the moonlight.

I turned and raced to the back of the hangar. I knew where Fenton and Marlowe were headed. I just needed to get there in time and figure out how I was going to kill a werewolf mage and a beta all at once.

CHAPTER 17: ALPHA AND OMEGA

PUMPING MY LEGS HARD, I raced back to the airship towers. In the distance, I heard that someone had raised the alarm and was calling for the Bow Street boys. I shook my head. Complications. Always, complications.

When I got to the towers, I saw that Marlowe and the others had already boarded the lift to take them up to the second level. I turned and raced up the steps, eyeing the airship the wolves had been packing up.

Dammit. They were already pulling up the anchor. The balloon of the airship filled with hot air, making the balloon glow with orange light. The ship made ready for departure. Fenton and the others hurried down the ramp. When Professor Jamison struggled, Fenton clocked her on the back of her head with his pistol then threw her over his shoulder.

Marlowe cursed loudly at him.

I arrived at the last step, turning the corner just in time to see the crew pull up the last lead rope.

Hell's bells. I was too late.

If I shot out the balloon, the ship would crash, killing the very people I was trying to rescue. I eyed the platform. Jumping onto the ship that had been docked just behind the werewolves' craft, I raced to the bow of that airship. I pulled out my silver dagger, sliced a supporting rope, and then swung from that airship to the werewolves' craft.

My stomach rocked as I swung haphazardly through the air between the ships. There was far too much space between me and the earth below. Pushed by the force of my acceleration, I swung over the back of the airship, dropping onto the deck before the rope lost its forward velocity.

But my landing was not subtle. I hit the deck hard.

"Little Red," one of the werewolves yelled then turned toward me.

Taking aim, I shot.

Having taken them by surprise, the werewolves, who were still in human form—so not to alert the airship guards, I supposed—were slow to react. All the better for me. I was able to get off three shots before I heard the door to the captain's cabin open.

Fenton and Marlowe emerged.

Fenton moved to lunge at me, but Marlowe raised his hand, stopping Fenton.

“Kit Marlowe,” I said. “Her Majesty asked me to remind you that you were sent into exile. Your sentence has not been commuted nor revoked. If you would kindly re-exile yourself—and I can assist you if you will not—then all this drama can come to an end.”

The old werewolf laughed. “Tell Her Majesty I am disinclined to agree. As for you,” he said, then whispered something softly, making a strange arcane figure in the air, “I think I’m quite done with bravado.”

A strange feeling washed over me, and quite against my will, I felt myself moving toward the side of the ship as if pushed by a gust. I gasped. The mage had cast a spell on me. Pulling away with all my might, I sought to resist the spell.

The mage frowned then whispered again, once more drawing the invisible arcane symbol.

I tried to lift my arm, trying to get my weapon on the monster so I could get off a shot, but my arm felt so heavy. It felt as if it was being pressed down by a dozen men. Yet slowly, inch by inch, I lifted my gun.

“What is this?” Marlowe said through gritted teeth. “What are you doing?” This time, he spoke aloud, shouting his spell in Latin.

I resisted once more, but could not break out of the spell as I felt myself slowly sliding toward the open plank. If I didn’t break free, I would be

thrown to my death.

Fenton laughed, "Goodbye, Little Red."

"No," I whispered. "No!" I resisted with all my might. I closed my eyes. *No*. In that single moment, I felt something powerful flutter alive inside me. The power was something larger than me, greater than me, but soft, gentle, no lighter than a butterfly. But this deep power, delicate as it might have been, was made of sturdy silver.

I stopped cold.

"No," Marlowe said, glaring at me. "It cannot be."

A split second later, a strange sound distracted me. I heard wings and the squeaking sound of bats. A massive swarm of bats covered the deck of the airship. In that single moment, two of the remaining wolves screamed and fell over the side of the vessel. Moving in a torrent, the bats swirled then disappeared, leaving behind Agent Rose and Constantine.

Fenton growled in frustration. Seeing the hopelessness of the situation, the coward grabbed a rope, then swung off, leaving Marlowe alone.

Marlowe glared at Constantine then started casting another incantation.

"Constantine," Agent Rose warned, but she didn't need to say anything. With strength that impressed and frightened me, the vampire flew across the deck of the ship, picked up the mage, then sank his fangs deep into the werewolf's neck.

The werewolf's spell died in his throat. To my horror, I watched as the vampire sucked the wolf's blood, the werewolf's body shrinking in his hands like he'd been left to dry in the sun.

Pulling myself away from the terrible sight, I raced to the side of the ship and watched as Fenton disappeared back into the night.

"Hell's bells," I swore then turned and looked around for another rope.

At that same moment, I realized the ship was descending. Quickly.

I scanned around. No captain. No balloonman.

“Clemeney, the ship,” Agent Rose said.

“The tinkers are inside,” I said, pointing to the captain’s cabin.

Understanding, she nodded. “Go. Go. We’ve got this.”

Grabbing the rope, I turned and jumped off the airship. I slipped down the rope to the ground. Slipping on my night optic, I caught sight of Fenton as the werewolf turned and ran away from the airship towers back into the city.

Gritting my teeth, I turned and raced behind him.

He wouldn’t get away that easy.

CHAPTER 18: AN EYE FOR AN EYE

I COULD HEAR THE SOUND OF MY BOOTS hitting the cobblestone, the beating of my heart, and the telltale grunt of the werewolf racing ahead of me. If I let Fenton get away, I was failing everyone. I was failing to avenge Quinn and Agent Reid, endangering Lionheart, and putting the Society at risk. There was no way Marlowe could have survived Constantine's terrible revenge. But letting Fenton get away meant war between the packs. As vexing as Lionheart was, I now understood his true nature. He was a knight. That had never changed. He had acted because his monarch had told him to.

Fenton howled loudly then scurried up the side of a building. I raced behind him, scampering up a ladder and onto a rooftop.

Now we were on familiar ground.

He hung from a church steeple and glared back at me, his eyes fiery red.

I pulled my pistol, steadied my breath, and forced my heart to be silent as I trained my weapon on the figure silhouetted against the moonlight.

Inhale.

Exhale.

Taking aim, I pulled the trigger.

Too late.

He turned and raced off across the rooftops.

"Hell's bells," I swore through gritted teeth then took off after him. My heart pounded in my chest as I leaped from the rooftop across the alley. When I landed, the tiles under my footfall broke and went crashing down to the cobblestones below.

Ahead of me, the wolf barked, a sound that almost sounded like a laugh. The beast looked back over his shoulder at me, his eyes glimmering red as

rubies in the moonlight.

I gritted my teeth, realizing then that the werewolf was moving with purpose. But to where? We raced past Tinker's Tower then into the city and up the Strand.

Fenton jumped to the street below.

A horse whinnied loudly, and a moment later, a woman screamed.

I rushed across the roof, balancing on a loading beam above the door of the tannery, then grabbed a rope and dropped onto the street.

And then, because apparently, I was some kind of idiot, I raced in the direction of the monster and the screams rather than away from them.

Grand-mère would have called me a fool.

Grand-mère.

The wolf looked back at me, his teeth bared but a wickedly gleeful expression on his face.

Oh no. No, no, no.

Wolves had keen hearing and a sense of smell that was without compare. Had Fenton trailed me? Did the packs know where my grand-mère lived?

Of course, they did.

Of course.

We raced down the Strand, past the theatres, St Mary-le-Strand, and then toward Saint Clement Danes.

There was no doubt in my mind where Fenton was headed. There was only one person in this world I truly cared about save Quinn, only one bargaining chip a werewolf could hold over my head, and the werewolf was headed on a straight course toward her.

But this was my neighborhood.

I turned, slipping down a side alley. I turned right then left, rushing down a narrow passageway, through a stable, and into a side alley that would exit onto the street outside my grand-mère's building.

I burst out of the alley and onto the street just as Fenton turned the corner.

Pulling both my pistols, I took aim at the monster.

"Stop," I said commandingly.

The wolf slid to a stop then eyed the windows of the building. He could make the jump, crash through the window, and grab my grand-mère if he wanted. I flicked an eye upward and caught sight of her silhouette through the curtain. He could do that, but not before I shot him first. It was dark, but the optic I wore outlined the monster perfectly.

I could feel him watching me. I could feel him waiting to see what I was going to do.

"Come on now, Fenton. No need to make it personal. Let's go back to headquarters and have a chat."

"Not going to happen, Little Red," he said, his voice was raspy. "You let me go. Now. Or I'll rip out dear granny's throat."

I frowned. "Now, we both know that's not an option. Cyril is, no doubt, dead by now. Marlowe as well, or did you miss Constantine making a snack out of that crusty old bugger? Speaking of, even if I don't end you now, the vampire will likely hunt you down and kill you. I have some nice silver cuffs here. Let me go ahead and slip them on. Show Her Majesty you're willing to talk. Maybe she'll let you rot away somewhere, spare your miserable life."

"Or, you holster those pistols, and I walk."

"I can't do that."

“You aren’t leaving me with options, Little Red,” he said then looked up at the window once more.

I pulled the hammers back on my pistols.

The werewolf growled, his anger boiling. “You must be either really brave or really stupid.”

“Probably a bit of both, I confess,” I said. I closed my right eye, looking through the optic on the left. I could see him even more clearly this way. There was no way that werewolf would get past me.

“Shame to kill you. You’re too pretty. Wonder if you taste as good as you smell,” Fenton said.

Again with the smell. His odd comment threw me off guard.

The beast crouched then lunged at me.

Dammit.

Taking aim, I shot at the monster.

The beast yelped but came at me again. I shot once more, but he kept coming. I felt my breath go out of me as the werewolf slammed me to the ground. My pistols bounced out of my hands as I hit the cobblestone hard.

A slathering face, half-man half-wolf, looked down at me as he pinned me to the ground. He was bleeding profusely from both his stomach and his left shoulder. He barred his teeth, slobber dripping onto me as he glared down at me. He eyed the optic I wore.

Sneering, he slashed the device off my face.

I screamed as his claws raked my face.

But at that same moment, my instincts kicked in. I reached into my belt and grabbed the silver dagger that I always wore. Squeezing my hand around the blade, feeling the silver sing in response to my touch, I heaved it with all my might and slammed it into the werewolf’s chest.

Fenton let out a strange howl that quickly faded into a gurgle. He then tipped over, falling off me.

Gasping, I sat up.

I couldn't see out of my left eye. Blood was dripping down my face. I quickly grabbed a scarf from my pocket and held it against my eye. Fenton lay on the street. He had transformed fully into wolf form as they all did when they were dead.

Sneering, I knelt beside him.

"This is for Quinn," I said then sinking my silver blade into his flesh, I skinned off a massive piece of silver fur from his hide.

I rose then, my knees shaking, and looked up at the window.

Grand-mère was pressed against the glass. When she saw it was me, she screamed.

Black spots swam before my eyes, and I tumbled to my knees. I stared down at the silver blade in my hand. Strange. Through the hazy vision of my bloody eye, the blade shimmered blue.

The front door opened. "Clemenly," Grand-mère screamed, rushing into the street. She scooped me up in her arms. "Clemenly, oh my God."

"Send word to Greystock," I whispered.

"Clemenly? Clemenly! Missus Rossiter, send for a surgeon," Grand-mère called to a neighbor who must have come outside to see what all the commotion was about.

"Is that a wolf? A wolf? In the streets of London?" the woman replied, astonished.

"Stupid woman, send for a surgeon!" Grand-mère demanded then turned her attention back to me. "You're all right now, my girl. Don't you worry. You got that old sinner. Don't worry, I'm here," she said.

And then I fainted in her arms.

CHAPTER 19: WHO'S AFRAID OF THE BIG, BAD WOLF?

I WOKE IN A TOO-BRIGHT ROOM with an awful headache. I opened my eyes slowly, but a sharp pain rocked my left eye so terribly that I let out a little whine.

“Agent, don’t try to open your left eye. Let me go fetch the doctor. Just lie back and rest.”

“Where am I?” I eyed the woman carefully, noting the pin on her lapel, the initials R. M. encapsulated in a circle. She worked for the Rude Mechanicals.

“Newstead Abbey,” she said then turned and left.

Newstead Abbey? What in the world was I doing in Nottingham?

My whole body ached. I reached up and touched my face. There were bandages on my cheek and forehead, and my entire eye was covered.

I closed my good eye and lay back.

I heard footsteps and voices in the hallway. A moment later, the door to my room opened. Someone sat down at the side of my bed and took my hand. I opened my eye a crack to see Agent Greystock sitting there.

“Clemeney,” she said softly.

“Agent Greystock. How is Grand-mère? Is she all right?”

“Fine, fine,” Agent Greystock said. “Angry with me, but fine.”

“What happened?”

“Fenton. You were gravely injured. The surgeon informed us you may have lost use of your eye permanently. And... you have a scratch on your face, from your hairline to your cheek.”

I paused a moment. “I... I meant with Lionheart and the others. Is everyone all right?” While my chief concern had not been about my own injuries—it was plain to me that I was banged up—I considered her words. The wounds she described were both severe and disfiguring.

Agent Greystock nodded. “Agent Rose reported in,” she said then shook her head. “Willful girl. Bold, brave, but reckless. Cyril is dead. Marlowe is dead. Lupercal pack... They’re either dead or arrested, as are Whitechapel, Conklin, and Paddington.”

“Arresting werewolves won’t do much to ease their seething anger.”

“No, but deporting them to Australia will help. They will either accept the new alpha, or they will take a long ride bound in silver to the colony of thieves.”

“The new alpha... Lionheart?”

Agent Greystock nodded, but she looked pensive. “For now, at least. He is adamant that he doesn’t want to retain the role. He met with Her Majesty. I was there. It was a *difficult* conversation. But he inquired about you and sent his wishes for your speedy recovery.”

“He’s not half bad, for a werewolf.”

Agent Greystock smiled lightly, but I could see her mind was still troubled.

“What is it?” I asked.

“Clemeny... I can’t forgive myself for what has happened to you, Quinn, and Agent Reid. I underestimated the packs—”

“We all did.”

“No. I should have seen a larger problem was brewing. I missed it. I, well, I have asked for a transfer to archives.”

“No.”

“It’s time for someone with more experience in the field, someone who will understand your work and the danger, to take charge. Her Majesty took my suggestions for a replacement into consideration. She has selected an agent based out of Scotland who comes highly recommended and is well known for hunting demons. By the time you recover, he’ll be on the job.”

“But Agent Greystock... The job won’t be the same.”

“No. But Lionheart will need you. Her Majesty will need you. A smooth exchange of power must take place, or there will be chaos. The Red Cape Society must take a prominent role, and word on the street is that *Little Red* is the most feared werewolf hunter in London. I need you back to work. Agent Hunter will be expecting you to report in as soon as you are fully recovered.”

“Agent Hunter?”

“Edwin Hunter. Your new commanding officer.”

I frowned. “Sounds like a prat.”

Agent Greystock chuckled. “Well, I guess you’ll have to see for yourself. There is a lot of work ahead of you. Whichever wolves Her Majesty doesn’t send off to enjoy the wilds of Australia will be turned loose back on the street with nothing more than a promise that they will behave and follow the leadership of the new alpha.”

“Highly unlikely, you know.”

“Of course. That’s why you need to recover soon. London has always had a werewolf problem. It will be up to you to keep them in check. Get some rest, Clemenly. Her Majesty needs you,” she said with a smile then turned and headed back out of the room.

I lay back on my pillow and closed my good eye.

It would be all right.

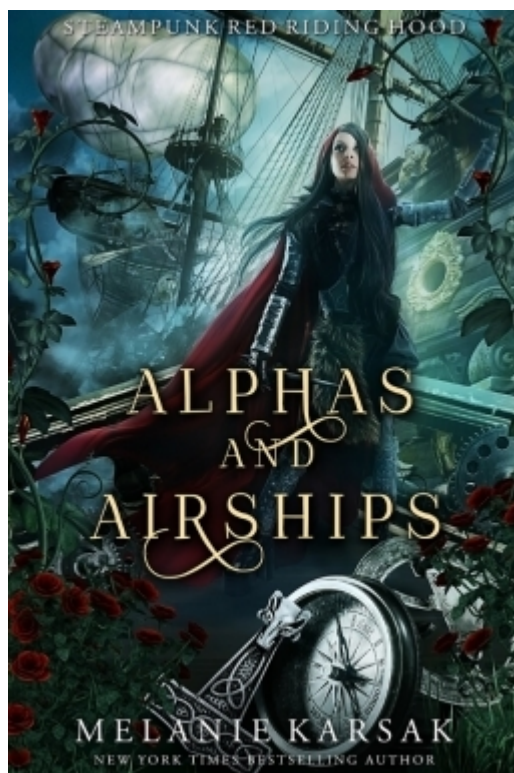
Lionheart would get the packs in check, and I would get any outliers in hand. I'd recover and be back on the street in no time. Fenton was gone. And despite whatever ugly mess was under my bandages, nothing would stop me from keeping the streets of London safe.

I had never been afraid of a big bad wolf.

And I wouldn't start now.

* * *

CONTINUE CLEMENY'S STORY IN [ALPHAS](#) [AND AIRSHIPS](#)



With Lionheart as the new alpha, the streets of London are quiet. But above the realm, mischief is brewing.

While airship pirates are a common plague upon the kingdom, the airship *Fenrir* proves particularly troublesome—especially on a full moon.

Clemenya must take to the skies before these shape-shifting Vikings kick off a new Ragnarok. Easier said than done now that she's down one good eye, a partner, and not to mention the fact that she gets motion sick.

On top of that, the new scar across her face makes Clemenya feel like she'll have better luck intimidating her foes than finding a beau. But Agent Edwin Hunter, recently assigned as head of Clemenya's division, is proving to be an interesting prospect. Despite her apprehensions, it's up to Agent Louvel to chase Fenrir across the heavens.

THANK YOU

Thank you so much for joining me for this first adventure in Clemeney's series. Initially, I'd only planned to write one steampunk Red Riding Hood book, but Clemeney told me she had more to say. She's kind of intimidating, so I didn't disagree. I have six novels planned for her story arc. If you join my newsletter, I'll keep you updated on all her releases as well as any other steampunk fairy tales. The characters of the Knave and Caterpillar and the tavern the Mushroom, briefly featured in this novel, play a large role in *Curiouser and Curiouser: Steampunk Alice in Wonderland*. You'll find lots of little Easter eggs like that planted throughout all my steampunk series. Be sure to join my newsletter for more details. You'll also get some free books and goodies just for joining. You can find me here:

Join Melanie's Newsletter

[Join my Newsletter and get TWO FREE BOOKS and an EXCLUSIVE downloadable *Steampunk Alice in Wonderland Adult Coloring Book!*](#)

HAVE A MINUTE? CAN YOU LEAVE A REVIEW?

If you have just a moment, would you mind leaving me a review? Word of mouth is an author's best friend, and other readers would like to know what you think. As well, the more reviews I have, the better my chances of securing premium advertising spots and other opportunities for visibility. I do read all my reviews. I appreciate your time and thoughts. Thank you!

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Many thanks to Becky Stephens, Jessica Nelson, and Carrie Wells for their help shaping this book.

Thank you to Erin Hayes for making my paperbacks beautiful.

A special thanks to all my Steampunk Fairy Tales ARC readers!

Thank you to Karri Klawiter for designing such a beautiful cover.

Thanks to Mark Fisher and my friends at Electromagnetic Press for hauling my books all over the country!

As always, thank you to the BIC group and my beloved family for all of your support.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Melanie Karsak is the author of *The Airship Racing Chronicles*, *The Harvesting Series*, *The Burnt Earth Series*, *The Celtic Blood Series*, and the *Steampunk Fairy Tales Series*. A steampunk connoisseur, zombie whisperer, and heir to the iron throne, the author currently lives in Florida with her husband and two children. She is an Instructor of English at Eastern Florida State College.

Keep in touch with Melanie online.

[Blog](#)

[Twitter](#)

[Facebook](#)

[Pinterest](#)

Ready for more Steampunk Red Riding Hood? Follow Clemeny here:

[Wolves and Daggers, Book 1](#)

[Alphas and Airships, Book 2](#)

[Peppermint and Pentacles, Book 3](#)

Check out all of Melanie's *Steampunk Fairy Tales*

[Beauty and Beastly: Steampunk Beauty and the Beast](#)

[Ice and Embers: Steampunk Snow Queen](#)

[Curiouser and Curiouser: Steampunk Alice in Wonderland](#)

**Ready to go airship racing? Meet Lily Stargazer and her crew in *The Airship Racing Chronicles*
(this series contains mature content)**

[Chasing the Star Garden](#)

[Chasing the Green Fairy.](#)

Join Melanie's Newsletter

[Join my Newsletter and get TWO FREE BOOKS and an EXCLUSIVE downloadable *Steampunk Alice in Wonderland Adult Coloring Book!*](#)

SNEAK PEEK: CURIUSER AND CURIUSER: STEAMPUNK ALICE IN WONDERLAND

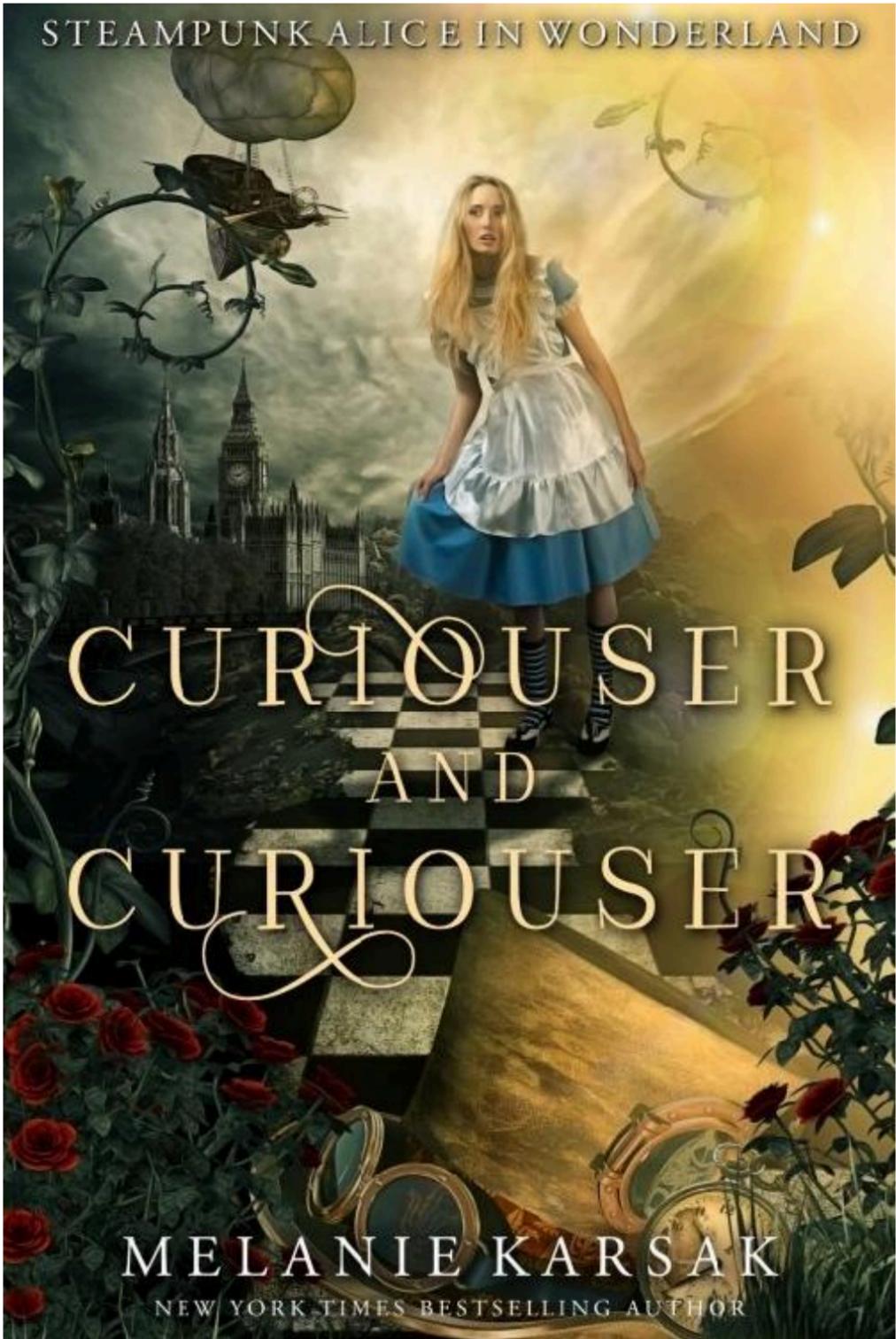
*To save the Hatter, Alice must work with the one man she despises so much
that she might still love him.*

Alice thought she'd turned over a new leaf. No more working for Jabberwocky. No more making deals with the ruthless Queen of Hearts. No more hanging around The Mushroom with tinkers, tarts, scoundrels, and thieves in London's criminal underbelly. But she'd been bonkers to dream.

Hatter's reckless behavior leads Alice back to the one person she never wanted to see again, Caterpillar. Pulled into Caterpillar's mad schemes, Alice must steal a very big diamond from a very royal lady. The heist is no problem for this Bandersnatch. But protecting her heart from the man she once loved? Impossible.

Sometimes love is mad.

STEAMPUNK ALICE IN WONDERLAND



CURIOUSER
AND
CURIOUSER

MELANIE KARSAK

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR

CURIOUSER AND CURIOUSER: CHAPTER 1:

THE POCKET WATCH

“CURIOUS.” I STRAINED TO LOOK OUT THE WINDOW of the carriage at the crowd thronging toward Hyde Park. A man on a Daedalus steam-powered buggy motored past. The well-dressed ladies in the back seat, their parasols shading them from the late afternoon sun, laughed wildly as they sped by. “Where are they all going?”

“The Crystal Palace,” Lord Dodgson pronounced grandly. “The Great Exhibition opened this week. I was planning to have a look myself,” he said, snapping the paper he was trying to read in an effort to straighten it, a motion he’d made ten times already since we’d left Hungerford Market. It was starting to get on my nerves.

“Her Majesty already opened the exhibit?” I asked, trying to hide the disappointment in my voice.

Lord Dodgson laughed. “Don’t you keep up on the local gossip, Alice? The whole town is talking about the Crystal Palace’s opening. A whole building made of glass and filled with mechanical inventions and wonders from the world afar...what a sight. I heard the opening was grand. Crowded but grand.”

I frowned. I’d thought the opening was next week. The park was located close to Lord Dodgson’s London home. I’d hoped to catch a glimpse of Queen Victoria but had missed my chance once again.

Half hanging out the carriage window, I strained to get a look at the festivities. The revelers had cleared a path and stood to watch as a man led a clockwork horse, its steel and copper body glinting in the sunlight, into the park. I could just make out tents sitting in Hyde Park’s green space. “Then I

guess that means the airship races have started,” I said. In fact, the Great Exhibition’s opening had been timed to the British Airship Qualifying races.

“I didn’t fancy you a fan of the aether sports,” Lord Dodgson said.

“I’m not. But I have a friend who adores them.”

Adores, of course, was the wrong word. I tried to calm the uneasy feeling that rocked my stomach. It was Friday. If the races had opened on Monday, then Henry might already be in trouble. Had I seen him that morning? Had he gone to the shop? I tried to think back but couldn’t remember. Last race season he’d gambled away everything he owned down to the clothes on his back. Even his favorite top hat had gone to some bloody airship pirate. Race season always equaled trouble for my dear friend who couldn’t help but try to hedge his bets. His reasons for trying were honorable. His methods, however, were suspect.

“I’m not for any of that nonsense either,” Lord Dodgson proclaimed. “Racing around the sky like we were meant to have wings. No, no. My carriage will do just fine. It gets us where we need to go, doesn’t it, Alice?”

“Yes, Your Grace.”

Lord Dodgson laughed. “When you use formal address, you sound trite.”

I grinned. “What an odd thing to say. Shouldn’t one try to adopt manners?”

“Perhaps. But perhaps not when they are completely contradictory to that person’s general nature.”

“But aren’t manners completely contradictory to all of mankind’s nature? If, in essence, we are little more than creatures who are brutish and sinful, then manners are merely a mask for the base matter that lives within us all. And if that’s the case, we’d be wise to drop them entirely, if we

wanted to be more honest. Or should we all lie and adopt the best of manners, thus go around being false? At least we'd all be equally false."

Lord Dodgson laughed again then removed his monocle and looked at me. "Alice Lewis, you might be the brightest girl I've ever met."

"I'll take that as a compliment, *mister*," I replied with a wink.

"Now, there's the scruffy guttersnipe I hired," he said then snapped his paper once more. "Is there another way to take that comment as anything but a compliment?"

"At least five. Possibly more."

"Alice," he said, shaking his head. He looked back at his reading.

Well, it was true. Did he mean to imply he'd met only a few women of intelligence, or that most women were unintelligent, or that he thought he would meet wittier girls in the future, or when he said I *might* be bright did that mean he was uncertain, and how did he define bright anyway? Was he referring to my hair? Or maybe my eyes? Or did he just mean he found me intelligent? Thinking about it gave me a headache, and I was already a mess of nerves worrying that Henry had already gambled away every shilling he had. Come to think of it, Bess said he hadn't been by for dinner last night.

The carriage rolled to a stop outside Lord Dodgson's home. I smoothed my white apron and grabbed the packages sitting on the seat beside me.

"Your Grace," the footman said, opening the door.

Lord Dodgson sighed heavily, folded his paper under his arm, and grabbed his cane. His bad knee would be aching after his walk through the market, but I guessed he wouldn't complain. He'd had too much fun shopping for his niece's birthday. The parcels I juggled were proof of that. I don't think there was an item left at the market suitable for a girl around the age of six. What would other six-year-old girls receive for their birthday now that *His Grace* had purchased the lot? Of course, when I was six, I'd

been at the workhouse laboring on a machine until I'd found different *employment* in the city. It's amazing how quickly little fingers can learn to do very evil deeds. But young Charlotte Dodgson, the lord's niece, would never have to worry about learning how to pick a pocket. A better life was reserved for her, and I didn't begrudge her for it.

"Your Grace," the footman called, his voice full of alarm.

A moment later, Lord Dodgson cried out in pain.

I emerged from the carriage to see that he'd slipped on the cobblestone, landing on his bad knee.

I dropped the packages, cringing when I heard the telltale clatter of broken glass, then rushed to help him up.

"Steady him," I told the footman. "Easy, Your Grace. We've got you."

"Son of a bitch," Lord Dodgson muttered.

"Manners, Your Grace," I said as I gently lifted him.

Despite himself, Lord Dodgson laughed. "Ow," he said, then laughed again. "Ow...oh, Alice."

Steadying him, the footman and I helped our master stand up.

A moment later, I heard feet rushing quickly down the cobblestone toward us. The sound of it set my nerves on edge, and my old instincts kicked in. The runner didn't slow as the footsteps approached. I moved to grab the knife hidden out of sight under my apron, but my hands were all tied up with Lord Dodgson. If I let go, he would fall.

"Watch yourself, boy. What? Hey," the footman called.

A boy with a mop of striking white hair, wearing an expensive but oversized waistcoat, slipped between us and was gone again in a flash.

"My pocket watch! My grandfather's pocket watch," Lord Dodgson cried, clutching his vest where he always kept his pocket watch. "Stop that boy. He stole my pocket watch. Alice!"

I glanced up the street to see the boy dangle the pocket watch teasingly before us.

“Rabbit,” I hissed.

“Your Grace...I need to—”

“Go, Alice. Go.”

The footman held tightly onto Lord Dodgson so I could let go. I turned and faced the boy. Rabbit, the little albino street rat, was grinning at me. Sneaky little pickpocket. What was he doing in my part of town? He’d grabbed the watch so deftly. Not bad. Some people said he was almost as good as I used to be.

Almost.

Ready to Join Alice in “Wonderland?”

[Keep Reading Here](#)

